



# LESSONS IN LITERACY



Save the Children

8 principles to ensure every last child can read

Cover Photo: Gul Bela in an ECCE home in Peshawar, Pakistan. He benefits from the Literacy Boost programme, which focuses on the five core skills that research shows are central for learning to read: letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading fluency and comprehension.

Credit: Asad Zaidi

***Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.  
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.  
We help them fulfil their potential.***

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Some names in case studies have been changed to protect identities.

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# FOREWORD

## Imagine a world where every last child can read

By Tove R. Wang, CEO of Save the Children Norway and Head of Save the Children's Education Global Theme

Imagine your six year old child taking her first steps into school. Feeling proud to start school and eager to learn. Filled with excitement and expectation. Nervous, too. Then imagine that your child comes back home with a little less confidence every day because she hasn't learnt much and still does not know how to read or write. This continues the whole first grade. And the next year. And the next. And the next. Would you accept this as a parent?

Now you can stop imagining. Because this is the reality for 130 million children. After four or more years in school, these children still lack basic literacy skills. In addition, there are 59 million children that have never started school, and approximately 61 million children who have dropped out during the first few years. As highlighted in our Every Last Child campaign, who misses out on learning is not a coincidence. We know that many of these children come from excluded groups – children who are not benefiting from access to health and education services because of a toxic mix of poverty and discrimination. We cannot continue to accept that over a third of primary school age children worldwide are not gaining even basic literacy skills.

Receiving a quality education is every child's right. Not only is the right to education clearly stated in the Convention of the Right of the Child, but world leaders have also committed through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to 'ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning' by 2030. Moreover, quality education is a prerequisite for reaching several of the other SDGs.

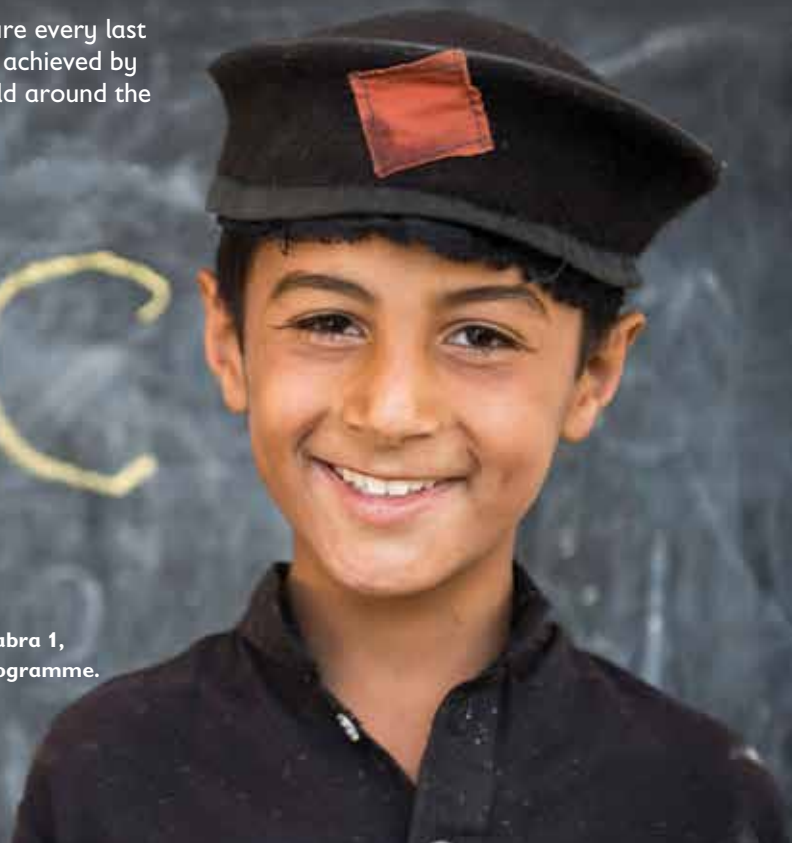
Education is more than just literacy. It is learning about your rights and being empowered to stand up for them. It is life skills, such as reflective thinking and questioning. Though how will a child acquire the skills and knowledge needed to develop and prosper if they are unable to read? Being able to read is one of the most critical foundational skills, and being illiterate itself can often lead to exclusion by acting as an additional driver of poverty and discrimination.

As Save the Children embarks on a new strategy, Ambition 2030, we promise to do whatever it takes to fulfil every last child's right to learn. Boosting literacy is essential to reach this goal. It is a pathway to future learning, and a foundational skill that can unlock a whole world of opportunities.

In this report, Save the Children shares lessons learned from our work on reading from 2012-2015. We present eight principles that form a comprehensive framework for effective literacy action. These are followed by policy recommendations needed to guide improved literacy outcomes worldwide.

There are practical steps that can be taken to ensure every last child learns to read. It is not impossible and can be achieved by 2030. We have made this promise to every last child around the world, so let's work together to make it a reality.

Waqas is a student at the government Primary School Gabra 1, Buner, Pakistan and participates in the Literacy Boost programme.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reading is an essential foundation for learning. The ability to understand written language is a basis for all education, and affords access to employment, rights, and services. Every child requires basic foundational literacy skills to open up life choices and opportunities. Conversely, the lack of these skills is strongly associated with social exclusion and the reinforcement of inequalities and disadvantage.

Over the last several decades the world has made incredible progress in getting children into school. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that every child is learning. While the focus on access to school has been important, it has been prioritised over educational quality, leading to what UNESCO and others have termed a ‘global learning crisis’. This crisis has meant that 250 million children are left behind, 130 million of whom cannot read despite completing four years of education.<sup>1</sup> For these children, not learning to read in their early years will limit their options and opportunities for a lifetime.

Literacy is also essential to tackling a broad range of critical development issues. It has been estimated that if all children in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, equivalent to a 12 per cent reduction in poverty worldwide.<sup>2</sup> The ability to read is positively associated with better health, higher income and economic growth, and exercise of rights. Enabling every child to read will help tackle inequities by ensuring that regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, disability or socio-economic background, every child starts out with a basic skillset with which to take on life’s challenges.

Between now and 2030, there is an opportunity to take action. In 2016 we have an unprecedented mandate to ensure every child leaves school able to read. The SDGs, and specifically SDG 4, have united the world behind a common aim of investing more strategically in education. SDG 4 promises to deliver access to quality education, as well as ensure the most disadvantaged children have equal opportunity to learn to read. It explicitly commits that “by 2030, all girls and boys

*complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”.* This is complemented by a range of other commitments to increase teacher supply, eliminate gender discrimination, and provide safe learning environments, among others.

More broadly, literacy will be key to ensuring that all gains made under the SDG framework are truly sustainable. It is essential to building the human resource capacity needed to drive global development and growth. Literacy is the basis for all learning, and learning in turn will equip us to drive advances in health, agriculture, industry and countless other fields.

Between now and 2030, the world has the opportunity to lay these foundations by ensuring every last child learns to read, thereby equipping future generations to lead development and growth.

## LESSONS IN LITERACY: SAVE THE CHILDREN’S WORK

Save the Children has delivered literacy initiatives for over twenty years. This report seeks to capture lessons from our experience that will inform action by governments, NGOs, civil society and the private sector to ensure every last child learns to read. Specifically, it draws on evidence from Save the Children’s four year global focus on literacy during 2012-15. As part of this initiative, we tracked thirty-five literacy programmes across twenty-two countries worldwide, gathering data and evidence in order to identify best practices and the areas where more work is needed in the future. We primarily worked with children aged 0-12 years, the majority of whom were in grades 1-3.

We tested a variety of programme models, including Literacy Boost, an approach to teaching and learning which has so far been adapted for over 30 locations; pre-school approaches including First Read and Emergent Literacy and Maths (ELM); and a broad-based approach to education quality called I’m Learning. We worked in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. We adapted our programmes to increase girls’ access to literacy, to meet the needs of linguistic minorities, and for implementation in conflict zones.

During this four year period, we:

- Made progress in literacy outcomes by developing impactful and cost-effective programme and delivery models.
- Successfully developed Literacy Boost as a simple, and replicable model which can be used to improve the teaching of reading, increase the availability of books and other reading materials, and mobilise communities to support children's reading.
- Developed effective approaches to pre-school literacy, which can be delivered affordably by parents and communities as well as through Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres.
- Tested more sustainable approaches to increasing book supply, working with publishers and other book industry stakeholders.
- Adapted programmes for multiple languages, assessing the linguistic nuances of each new context and adjusting our approach accordingly.
- Developed effective approaches to reading assessment which could be implemented by teachers and governments.
- Worked closely with governments from local to national levels to look at how best practices could be scaled up.

From 2012-2015, we directly reached over 1.3 million children, and worked with teachers, parents and community members in every programme location. The process generated large amounts of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, illustrating what works where, and why. In order to synthesise this data into a useful and communicable framework, Save the Children developed the '8 Principles for Effective Literacy Action', which form the basis of this report.

## 8 PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY ACTION

Across multiple countries and contexts, there were factors which emerged time and again as the most important in ensuring children learn to read. These are presented in this report as the 8 Principles – the essential components of effective literacy action. Through them, we do not aim to promote a simplified approach to literacy, but rather acknowledge the complexity inherent in ensuring every child learns to read. We have aimed to present a comprehensive framework, covering all the essential components of a quality literacy intervention. While not everything in the framework is new, it builds on and adds to the work of others in the education field.

The 8 Principles, and our findings in relation to them, are discussed in more detail in the body of this report.

An outline of each of the principles is given below:



### PRINCIPLE 1: START EARLY

*Young children need print rich environments and supportive language interactions in order to develop a solid foundation for learning to read when they get to primary school.*

Enabling children to get an early start by developing their emergent literacy skills, is essential to improve reading abilities in the long term. Through ages 0-6 years, before children begin primary school, it is important they have opportunities to develop vocabulary and become familiar with text. However, across the world, there is considerable inequity in access to early learning opportunities, with 159 million children – nearly half of all 3-6 year olds – without access to pre-school learning.<sup>3</sup>

During the past four years, Save the Children developed new, cost effective approaches to early learning. These included work with dedicated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres, as well as, with parents and communities, to raise awareness of the importance of literacy and help them support their children's reading development. Our programmes also demonstrated the value of investing in specific emergent literacy and maths training for ECD teachers, in order to support children's transition into primary school.



### PRINCIPLE 2: MORE AND BETTER BOOKS

*Children need a variety of age- and context-appropriate reading materials that spark their imagination and motivation to read, and build on their existing language skills.*

Globally, there is a shortage of age and context-appropriate children's titles to support early grade reading. A recent study commissioned by USAID surveyed availability of local-language children's titles in 11 African countries, and identified a profound scarcity of early grade reading texts compared to more advanced levels. There is also a scarcity of minority language texts – for example in Nigeria a survey found that only six out of 500 national languages were represented among early grade reading texts.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past four years, Save the Children tested an approach to increasing access to quality children's reading books. In Rwanda, Bhutan, Cambodia and the Philippines, Save the Children worked with governments and publishers to increase the supply of children's books and adapt existing books, with the goal of cultivating vibrant national publishing industries to generate a steady stream of new local-language titles.

Save the Children's work confirmed that the availability of high quality, age-appropriate reading materials is essential to improve literacy outcomes. Our programmes demonstrated the value of a 'whole chain' approach to book supply, addressing every stage of a book's journey from publisher to child.



### PRINCIPLE 3: ENGAGE PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

*Parents and community members need to be engaged to support children's language development and reading skills.*

In developing contexts, students sometimes spend as little as 11 per cent of their waking time in a school classroom, and only a small portion of that in-school time is devoted to learning reading skills.<sup>5</sup> As a result, it is critical to maximise the time that children can spend on reading outside of school, by engaging parents and communities in their children's learning.

In 22 countries, Save the Children developed a range of activities which communities and parents could implement to promote children's reading, including book banks, reading buddies, reading clubs and celebrations, and parent education workshops.

Save the Children's work confirmed the link between home literacy environment and primary grade reading skills in low resource settings. Across twelve sites where Literacy Boost was implemented, children that participated in out-of-school reading activities demonstrated better fluency, comprehension and letter recognition.



### PRINCIPLE 5: ENSURE TEACHERS CAN TEACH READING

*Teachers need to be trained and supported in explicit and systematic reading instruction, using the five component skills of early reading.*

In the majority of contexts across the world, teachers are equipped with generalised pedagogical skills but lack the specific training needed to effectively teach reading and literacy. Alongside the many other challenges related to teacher supply, this issue is a key contributing factor in the numbers of children that leave school without foundational literacy skills.

In 22 countries, Save the Children implemented the Literacy Boost model to support teachers to teach reading effectively. The model equips teachers to develop the five component reading skills (see pg. 16), and works on the basis that training should be regular; short; local to the teachers' place of work; reflective; and practical. Implementation of this model

demonstrated that reading can be taught effectively, and literacy outcomes improved, in a wide range of contexts through replication of a relatively simple model using the existing national curriculum. It also revealed several challenges that need to be addressed in the coming years in order to equip teachers to ensure every last child leaves school able to read.



### PRINCIPLE 5: LANGUAGE MATTERS

*Reading & writing instruction and activities for children – both in and out of school – should be conducted in a language that children understand.*

Children learn to read best in a language they speak and understand. Policy and practice related to the language of education have significant implications for children's learning opportunities. Language is also an equity issue – in many countries economically marginalised groups are also linguistic minorities and are doubly disadvantaged by the difficulties they experience in accessing education.

Save the Children implemented literacy programmes in countries with a range of different linguistic profiles. In practice this involved a rigorous process at the start of each new programme, encompassing decisions around the language of lessons, materials, and tests, how teachers are trained and deployed, and how to involve communities and local government in decisions around language.



### PRINCIPLE 6: PRACTICE, PRACTICE PRACTICE

*Children need ample opportunities to practise their literacy skills, both inside and outside of school.*

Children gain confidence through repeated, enjoyable opportunities to practise reading and writing – at home, in the community, and in school – and by using these skills in their daily life. It is widely proven that reading volume, or the amount of time a child engages in reading, is positively related to reading outcomes.<sup>6,7</sup> Save the Children's 12-site study of Literacy Boost replicated this important finding in a range of developing contexts – from urban Indonesia to rural Ethiopia – demonstrating that children who participate in more out-of-school reading activities have higher reading gains.<sup>8</sup>

In eight countries, Save the Children advocated for more time to be allocated to reading practice. We encouraged reading practice through our work with communities and during teacher training. In Rwanda



we developed a guide to help teachers use reading materials effectively in the classroom, while in the UK we developed and implemented the Families Connect programme to support parents to read at home with their children.



## PRINCIPLE 7: ASSESS & TRACK

*Formative and summative reading assessments should be conducted at regular intervals in order to tailor reading policies and programmes to the needs of individual learners, disadvantaged groups and students throughout the country.*

At classroom level, regular formative assessments are essential to ensure that the approach to teaching reading is continuously adjusted to meet learners' needs. Summative reading assessment data is needed by ministries to ensure evidence-based decision-making to improve policy and programme implementation.

Save the Children used a variety of tools to assess emergent literacy and core reading skills. In particular we developed the Literacy Boost assessment tool to test foundational-to-advanced reading skills and collect detailed student background data to inform evidence-based programming.



## PRINCIPLE 8: POLICY

*Government policies and an enabling environment must exist to support and sustain teachers, communities and parents to enable children to learn to read.*

Save the Children worked closely with governments in all programme locations to design and implement programmes, gather evidence and identify components for scale-up. However our work on literacy was most effective where we were able to achieve consensus between government, schools, communities, parents and civil society behind improving children's early reading opportunities. Therefore this report urges the development of clear and coherent national policy frameworks which will mobilise a broad set of stakeholders to improve children's reading. It recommends setting clear targets for children's early grade reading, supported by budgets and action plans.









This report argues that a strong reading culture in homes, schools and communities is essential to ensure every child learns to read. While 'reading culture' is difficult to define programmatically, this report suggests that it is possible, and necessary, to build such a culture through clear national policy frameworks, or National Literacy Action Plans, which set out commitments and responsibilities in relation to the previous seven principles described.

**A National Literacy Action Plan** is a comprehensive policy and implementation framework, supported by sufficient investment and resources, which drives early grade reading across all sectors, both in- and out-of-school.

Alishba writes on the board in her classroom in Pakistan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**TABLE 1: 8 PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY ACTION**

	<b>1. START EARLY:</b> Invest in scaling-up cost effective and quality models for improving emergent literacy skills in the early years, including via supporting parenting education and strengthening the home literacy environment.
	<b>2. PROVIDE MORE AND BETTER BOOKS:</b> Take a 'whole chain' approach to book supply, working with publishers to increase the quality of materials.
	<b>3. ENGAGE PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES:</b> Partner and invest in scaling-up implementation of effective community and parent-based literacy activities, which are adapted to the local context.
	<b>4. ENSURE TEACHERS CAN TEACH READING:</b> Teacher training should include instruction on the five core reading skills.
	<b>5. RECOGNISE THAT LANGUAGE MATTERS:</b> Provide support and resources for children who are learning in a language which is not their mother tongue.
	<b>6. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE:</b> Remove barriers to reading practice, ensure that time is scheduled in the school day and encourage reading outside of school.
	<b>7. ASSESS AND TRACK:</b> Invest in improved data collection on literacy to inform national and district policy and practice choices.
	<b>8. POLICY:</b> Ensure literacy is prioritised for government investment and resource allocation, and is a consideration throughout education decision-making and across other relevant sectors.

### CALL TO ACTION: ENSURING EVERY LAST CHILD CAN READ

The SDGs set out an inspiring and ambitious agenda for the next fifteen years. SDG 4 reinforces the right to a quality and inclusive education. It signifies a shift away from a simple focus on universal primary school access, to a focus on addressing the barriers to learning and equity gaps in education. This is a welcome and needed shift, which brings into stark focus the urgent need to scale-up efforts to ensure every last child learns to read.

This report calls for all countries to prioritise and invest in effective early literacy acquisition for children aged 0-12 years, in order to rapidly and effectively scale-up efforts to ensure every last child learns to read proficiently, and tackle the learning crisis. Unless governments, donors, NGOs and development agencies make investing in literacy a top priority now, there will be little chance of achieving SDG 4, and many of the other SDGs, by 2030.

The following actions are needed to ensure every last child learns to read:

- All countries should develop and adopt National Literacy Action Plans to support children's early grade reading and writing.<sup>i</sup> National Literacy Action Plans should be supported by dedicated, equitable and fair financing; and include targeted policies to remove any discrimination toward excluded groups. They should engage children, parents and communities and be accountable to them.

- Plans should include pre-primary and early grade reading and learning targets to ensure that all children learn to read with comprehension by the time they leave primary school, and set out how the children furthest behind will make progress to meet the targets in order to reduce equity gaps.
- Donors, NGOs and development agencies should ensure all their education interventions assess the impact on literacy acquisition and commit to supporting National Literacy Action Plans.
- Plans should identify and mobilise the wide range of individuals and institutions within a country that have a role to play in children's literacy acquisition, including the public and private sectors, parents and communities and children themselves.
- Plans should commit to delivering the 8 Principles outlined in this report.

The time to invest in literacy is now. We have an unprecedented mandate to revolutionise education systems worldwide, to increase quality and prioritise the needs of the most disadvantaged children. The next generation must be equipped to deliver on and sustain the achievements of the SDGs. Literacy will facilitate this, as an essential foundation for growth and development, and an investment in equity to ensure every last child can read.

<sup>i</sup> Some countries may already have national reading plans strategies (such as have been supported by USAID) or national policy frameworks for literacy – but national literacy action plans would serve to bring all of these pieces together into one place. These plans should include reading and writing and ensure there is sufficient political commitment and prioritisation and a clear action plan in place to deliver national literacy targets.

# INTRODUCTION: A CRISIS AND AN OPPORTUNITY

## REALISING THE RIGHT TO READ – A VISION FOR 2030

Every child has a right to learn to read. However, for too many children, this right is never realised. Amid soaring primary school enrolment in recent decades, there has not been a corresponding improvement in learning outcomes. The learning crisis, well documented by UNESCO, World Bank and others, has meant that 250 million children have been left behind, 130 million of whom cannot read despite completing four years of education.<sup>9</sup> For these children, not learning to read early on will limit their options and opportunities for a lifetime.

In 2016, we have an unprecedented mandate to take action on literacy. The SDGs set out clear targets for quality and equity in education. SDG 4 has potential to revolutionise the way we plan and invest in education, signaling a move towards a more comprehensive approach, which prioritises learning as well as access. With the SDGs as a framework, we have the opportunity to ensure that by 2030, no child leaves primary school without a strong foundation in literacy.

Save the Children has conceptualised **literacy** for its work as an individual competence, social act and cultural tool that involves the development, in school and in the home, of reading skills, including the development of letter knowledge, phonological processing, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

Grade 1 learner, Rebecca Hodi writes the five vowels 'a, e, i, o, u' on the ground at Gata Primary School in Southern Malawi to demonstrate the literacy knowledge and skills she is gaining.

Literacy is the key to tackling a range of challenges the SDGs seek to overcome over the next 15 years.<sup>10, 11, 12</sup> It provides a basis for lifelong learning, and is therefore essential to achieve each of the education targets included under SDG 4. Education in turn is positively associated with reduced poverty (SDG 1), better health (SDG 3), higher income and economic growth (SDG 8), and access to rights. It is an investment in future generations of doctors, teachers, civil servants, engineers and experts of every kind. It will ensure more women survive childbirth, more children survive their first year, and that future generations of children are sent to school.

It has been estimated that if all children in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, equivalent to a 12 per cent reduction in poverty worldwide.<sup>13</sup> The SDG framework provides a unique opportunity to prioritise literacy, as an investment in tackling poverty and inequality worldwide. This report presents evidence and recommendations for investing in effective approaches and best practice over the coming years, to ensure every child learns to read.

## 8 PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY ACTION

*Lessons in Literacy: 8 Principles to Ensure Every Last Child Can Read* presents 8 Principles for Effective Literacy Action. Throughout Save the Children's work on literacy and reading, these principles presented themselves as the most important factors in ensuring children learn to read. Together, they make a case for a comprehensive approach to literacy programming, which recognises the complexity of the learning process, and the multiple actors and resources involved. They form a framework for intelligent investment by governments, donors and NGOs, to ensure that effective programme models are prioritised for scale-up.

The 8 Principles are drawn from over 20 years of quality education and literacy programming at Save the Children, and specifically build on evidence from a period of innovation during 2009-2011 and our 2012-2015 strategy period. During this latter period, we committed to a global ambition to ensure every child leaves primary school able to read. Within its framework, we delivered literacy initiatives across 22 countries, directly reaching more than 1.3 million children and generating the evidence used throughout this report.

All 8 Principles are vital to improve literacy outcomes and it is our hope that they will offer inspiration and evidence to governments, donors and education practitioners, enriching the debate about what works in literacy, and highlighting best practices as well as the challenges ahead.

## THE NEED TO INVEST NOW TO ENSURE EVERY CHILD LEARNS TO READ

This report also proposes two overarching policy recommendations for governments, multi- and bilateral development agencies, NGOs and donors. The first is to prioritise and invest in early literacy acquisition now. The coming years are an opportunity to ensure that today's young children become tomorrow's readers. Within the broad and complex SDG framework, Save the Children advocates for prioritising increased investment in ensuring every child learns to read, as one of the foundations on which prosperity and equality can be built.

The second is for governments to inspire interest in reading through National Literacy Action Plans. There is a need to cultivate reading culture both within and outside schools, and to mobilise civil society and the private sector around a common goal to ensure every child learns to read. Children spend as little as 11 per cent of their waking hours in school, and need time and support outside of school to develop their reading.<sup>14</sup> This report makes the case for every government to establish a partnership with civil society and the private sector, as well as the policy frameworks, infrastructure and budget to make reading a national campaign behind which the public can rally.

## 2012-2015 – A FOCUS ON LITERACY

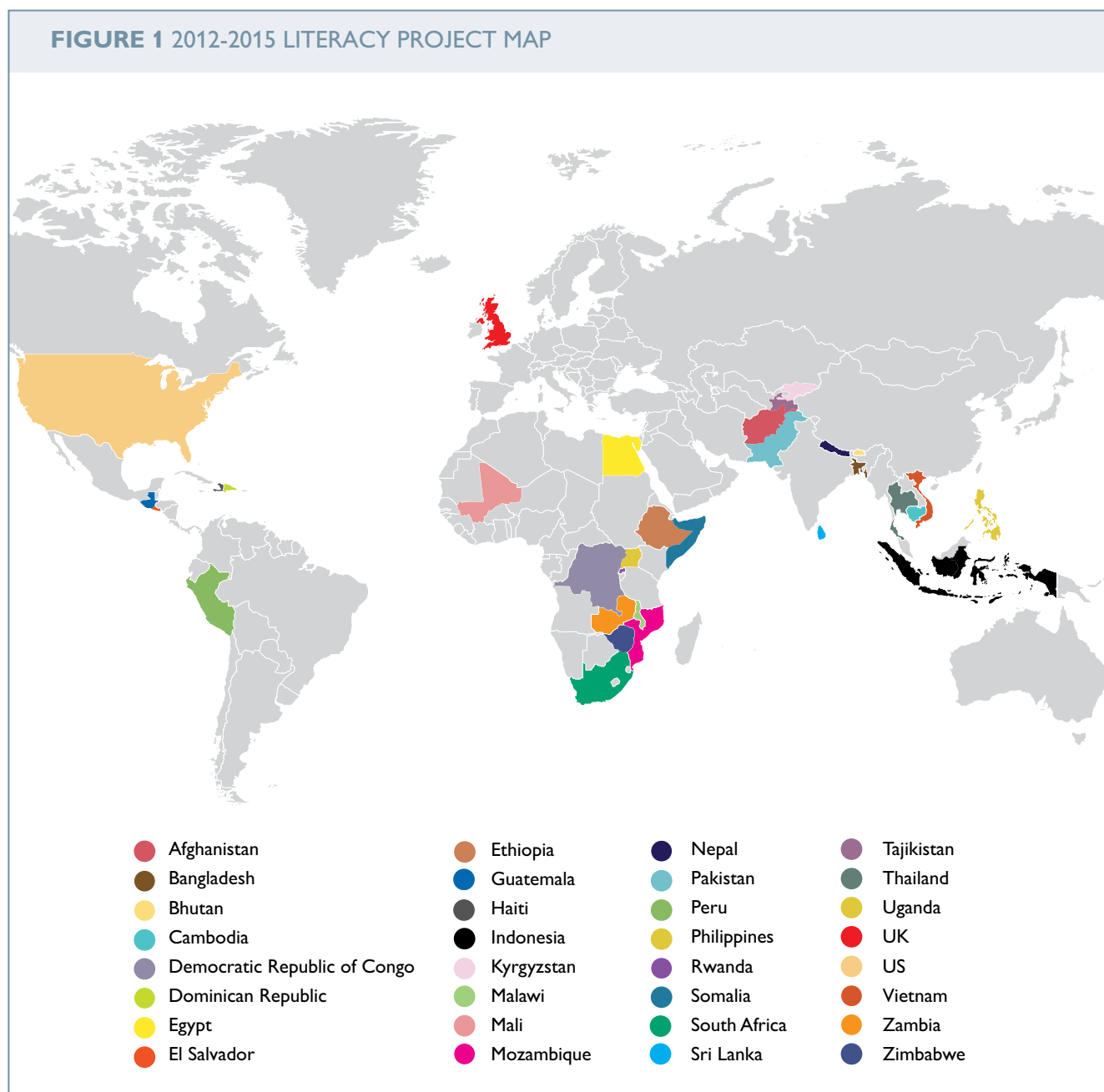
This report draws on evidence from Save the Children's four-year focus on literacy (2012-2015), a global effort to ensure every child leaves primary school able to read. The global focus on literacy was adopted across the organisation in 2012 in response to what UNESCO and others have termed the 'global learning crisis' – the realisation that in the face of expanding access, business as usual in teaching was not delivering improvements in foundational reading skills. Since the mid-2000s, data emerging from education systems across the world has presented Save the Children and others with evidence that despite increases in access to primary school, a significant proportion of children are not gaining a meaningful education. After piloting several approaches to this challenge during 2009-2011, the global focus on literacy sought to consolidate our approach during 2012-2015.

During these four years, Save the Children continued to test a variety of programme models. Literacy Boost (described in detail on pg. 16) is the most widely implemented, and has been adapted for 30 locations to meet teaching and learning needs across languages, as well as development and post-conflict settings. Save the Children also tested specific approaches to support development of foundational literacy skills in the years before primary school, including the Emergent Literacy and Maths (ELM) and First Read programmes. We incorporated a literacy focus into girls' education initiatives in Ethiopia, the Dominican Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique, and as part of a broad-based education quality approach known as I'm Learning, in Cambodia, Uganda and Zimbabwe. We also worked to improve the availability

of high quality children's reading materials, through the Children's Book Initiative implemented in Rwanda and Bhutan. In Rwanda, we implemented a combination of models for children 0-8 years old and are currently testing the relative impact of each approach.

Among these projects, 35 participated in central tracking for this report. Nearly half of the projects analysed (17) were in Asia, over a third (13) in Africa, and the rest in Latin America and the Middle East. Projects worked with children ages 0-12 years, with the majority in grades 1-3. They were funded through a variety of internal and external sources, including Save the Children's Child Sponsorship programme donations, as well as funding from bilateral aid organisations, private corporations, and foundations.<sup>ii</sup>

FIGURE 1 2012-2015 LITERACY PROJECT MAP



<sup>ii</sup> These included the United States Agency for International Development, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the New Zealand Agency for International Development, and the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

An overview of the results is included below, and findings are set out per principle throughout the remainder of the report. The report presents examples of best practice with potential to be replicated by others, as well as the challenges faced and areas where further research and action are required in order to develop effective and scalable models.

## RESULTS FROM OUR LITERACY PROGRAMMES

The global focus on literacy provided an opportunity for Save the Children to gather reading skills data across a range of locations. Baseline, midline, and/or

endline assessments were conducted across 22 sites during 2012-2015. The literacy programmes described in this report represent a multiplicity of interventions in a wide array of contexts. While this diversity provides a rich opportunity to gather evidence, it also poses a challenge for our research, as we seek to articulate what works globally to improve children's reading skills. Though Save the Children's literacy programmes are evaluated for impact, it is often beyond our capacity to measure and compare the nuanced components of different literacy interventions against each other or across contexts.



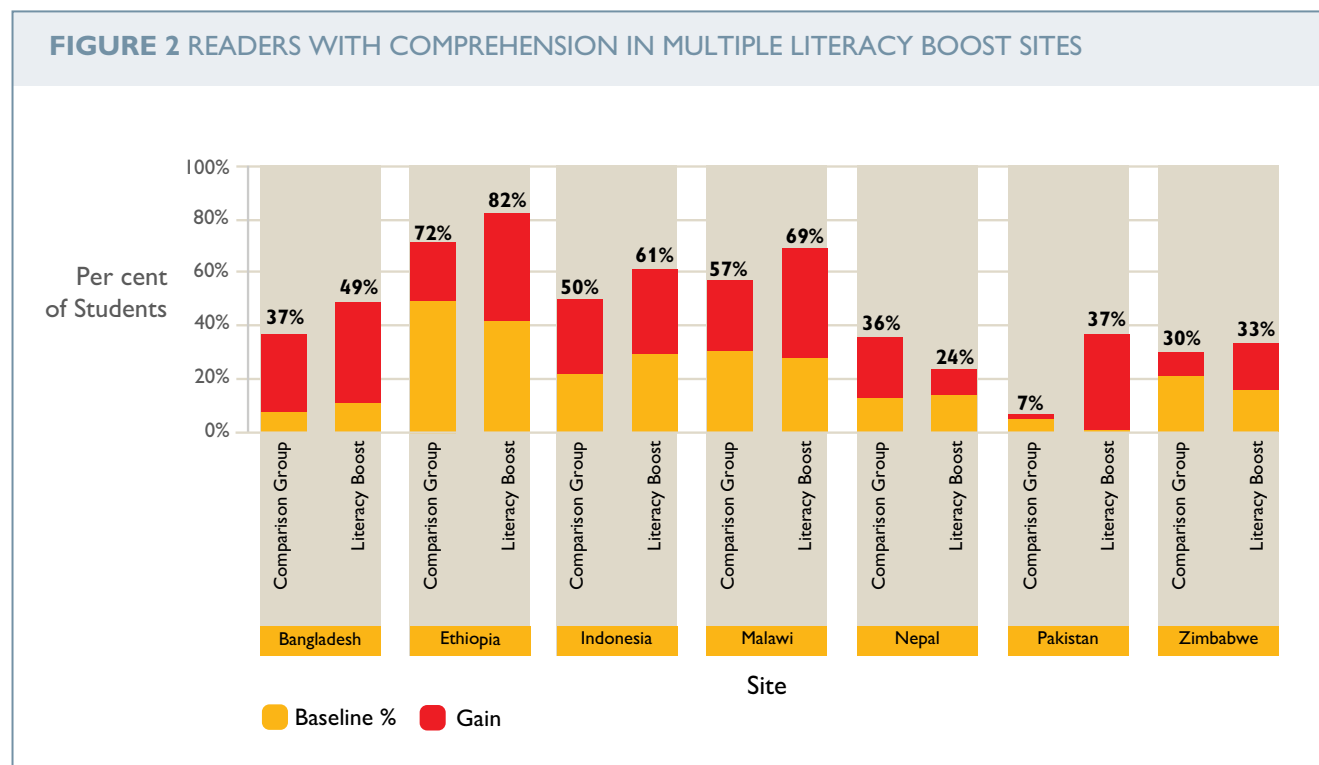
Photo: Susan Warner

Third graders, Kotek Alemu, Siake Toddese and Higawi Belachew, age 9, read together in their classroom. The Sengota Primary School is a government school in Ginchi, Ethiopia, which is part of Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme and is supported by sponsorship funding. The teachers at the school serve more than 1,100 students in grades 1-8. They received training from Save the Children as part of the sponsorship-supported Literacy Boost programme, which helps teachers learn how to effectively teach students how to read.

However, Save the Children's literacy programmes are increasingly designed to include specific research agendas, in order to increase our understanding of how different programme elements interact and their comparative impact. For example, several randomised control studies are currently underway in Bangladesh, Rwanda, Peru and Guatemala that will test the added value of Literacy Boost's community literacy activities compared to the value of teacher training alone. Save the Children also strives to gather data on the fidelity

of project implementation in an effort to determine what drives changes in reading skills and to what extent these can be attributed to particular programme components.

The data presented in Figure 2 represents seven programme sites where Save the Children was able to reliably assess the impact of its programming through a quasi-experimental research design with a comparison group.



Per cent of readers who can read with comprehension at endline in 7 Literacy Boost project sites. Readers with comprehension are those who could read a grade-level passage on their own and correctly answer 75-80 per cent of the comprehension questions about the passage. Comparison students are those who did not participate in the Literacy Boost program. These are sites that collected endline data in 2014 and showed evidence of Literacy Boost impact.<sup>15</sup>



Children clap along to reading activities in a print-rich classroom in Meherpur, Bangladesh.

# LITERACY BOOST: A PROVEN APPROACH

During 2012-2015, Literacy Boost was the most common approach employed by Save the Children to improve the reading skills of children in the early primary grades, implemented in 30 countries and reaching more than one million children in 2015.<sup>iii</sup> Many of the findings in this report derive from Literacy Boost evidence and experience. Some of its design principles and implementation modalities are noted below.

## Background and Design Principles

In crafting Literacy Boost, Save the Children turned to two important sources:

- 1. A global literature and knowledge base about how children learn to read and the essential inputs that facilitate this process.**
- 2. Existing good practice within Save the Children's and other NGOs' ongoing programmes, in areas such as teacher professional development, reading assessment and community mobilisation.**

Save the Children's review of the global literature identified the importance of explicit instruction on the five core reading skills and the need to address these skills as early as possible.<sup>16, 17</sup> Other elements of the literature resonated with Save the Children's experience of implementing education programmes with schools and communities around the world, including:

- The need to incorporate literacy and reading into children's daily lives, both inside and outside of school, recognising it is a social and cultural activity, as well as an educational one.<sup>18, 19</sup>
- The need to address reading materials and opportunities to read – both inside and outside of school.<sup>iv</sup>
- The need to make reading active and fun.<sup>v</sup>

This research base directly informed the three-component design of Literacy Boost: Teacher Training, Community Action, and Assessment.

### Five Core Reading Skills:

- 1. Letter Knowledge:** recognition of the letters of the alphabet.
- 2. Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to recognise and manipulate phonemes, the 'smallest units composing spoken language' (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- 3. Fluency:** The ability to read accurately, quickly, and with the correct intonation, prosody and appropriate phrasing.
- 4. Vocabulary:** the comprehension of a sufficient number of words to be able to understand text.
- 5. Comprehension:** 'The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with the written language' (Rand, 2002).

<sup>iii</sup> Countries include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi\*, Dominican Republic, DRC, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, India\*, Indonesia, Kenya\*, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal\*, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania\*, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia. (\*World Vision only countries)

<sup>iv</sup> Children's literacy development happens in schools and homes, and requires materials. It depends on both teachers and parents (Goldenberg, 2001, Hood, 2008), and on finding the means to enrich the type and amount of reading materials in children's lives.

<sup>v</sup> The real, predictive power of motivation to read must be lit and sustained using child-centred and active learning approaches that ensure progress to and success in higher levels of education (Pang, Muaka, Berhardt & Kamil, 2003; Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998).



## EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS AND EQUITY

Literacy Boost has a proven track record of improving children's reading skills. By 2013, Literacy Boost had completed a rigorous testing and development process and produced a body of evidence proving it to be effective, replicable and scalable in a range of contexts.<sup>vi</sup>

Save the Children investigated the impact of Literacy Boost across programme sites. A 2013 study found that in five out of seven countries, Literacy Boost students learned significantly more in core reading skills (letter identification, most-used word knowledge, fluency, accuracy, and reading comprehension) than students in comparison schools.<sup>vii, viii</sup>

Further, Literacy Boost has proven to be a flexible model that can be adapted to a variety of contexts. In 10 of its 30 current countries of operation, Literacy Boost is being delivered in multiple sites (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, and South Africa). In Ethiopia, Bangladesh, South Africa and Pakistan it has been scaled to a regional or provincial level, while in El Salvador, it has been scaled to a national level.

The successes and challenges encountered during implementation of Literacy Boost will be examined throughout this report, alongside other programme models. The 8 Principles framework is used to present findings from across the 2012-2015 focus on literacy.



**Third-grader Alemayehu, age 10, in his classroom in the Boda Primary School. The Boda Primary School is a government school in Boda, Ethiopia, which is part of Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme, and is supported by sponsorship funding.**

Photo: Susan Warner

- <sup>vi</sup> Save the Children's evidence base includes impact evaluations for the first year of Literacy Boost implementation in each programme site, as well as ongoing monitoring data after the model has proven to be effective. During analysis of impact data, we remove (via statistical control) the influence of sex, socioeconomic status, home literacy environment, and early childhood development programmes to focus on the singular Literacy Boost programme effect.
- <sup>vii</sup> The analysis, controlled for baseline reading scores, socioeconomic status, home literacy environment, sex, and age, and effect sizes across five countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Zimbabwe), ranged from 0.25 to 0.75 standard deviations. Impact comparisons in the two additional sites of Bangladesh and Mozambique are difficult due to implementation of community reading activities for both intervention and control groups in Bangladesh, and a high degree of measurement error and a high level of attrition across two years of intervention in Mozambique.
- <sup>viii</sup> Save the Children (2013). *Literacy Boost: Cross-Country Analysis Results*.



## GETTING TO SCALE: USING LITERACY BOOST TO ADDRESS THE LEARNING CRISIS IN EL SALVADOR

In El Salvador, the learning crisis is not an abstract concept, it is a reality facing educators in communities across the country. Save the Children's 2010 midterm evaluation of its Basic Education project found that while schools were able to retain children, by increasing registration, attendance and promotion rates, these students were not learning as expected for their age or grade.<sup>20</sup> This finding was backed up by national evaluations that found the average child in grades 1-3 was 1.5 grade levels behind in their literacy skills, and only one-third of third grade students could demonstrate basic language competencies.<sup>21</sup>

Save the Children staff used these troubling findings as a call to action to help the Ministry of Education recognise the learning crisis facing children in El Salvador, and develop interventions to improve children's learning.

In 2013 Save the Children launched a two-year pilot of the Literacy Boost programme in both periurban and rural schools, in partnership with the Ministry of Education. The goal was to test an evidence-based solution to improving reading outcomes, and lay a foundation for a potential national scale-up of Literacy Boost.

Over the last two years, Save the Children has worked hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Education to align Literacy Boost with the national language curriculum, and to revise the assessment tools to meet local needs. A committee from the government curriculum department co-developed the pilot, ensuring availability of teachers for training, establishing monitoring systems, and supporting data analysis. Curriculum specialists from Ministry of Education also trained teachers and ministry staff in the adapted model.

The first year of the pilot yielded positive results and Save the Children continued to adapt and improve programme design in year two. In 2015, Save the Children began working with the Ministry of Education to take steps to ensure that Literacy Boost is implemented in every primary school nationwide. Save the Children is supporting the Ministry's work to deliver a scaled-up Transitional Curriculum and is advising on impact evaluation. This process has demonstrated that a strong evidence base can provide a springboard for government action to tackle a learning crisis at national level.



Gerardo Arevalo works with Save the Children in a village in El Salvador. He devotes his time to helping children develop early so they can succeed in school, often visiting them at home where he teaches with the aid of picture books and flashcards.

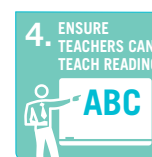
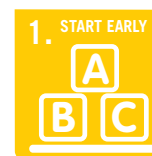


Photo: Karina Lopez

# PRINCIPLE 1: START EARLY

***Young children need print-rich environments and supportive language interactions in order to develop a solid foundation for learning to read when they get to primary school.***

On a child's journey to becoming a strong, independent reader, getting an early start – before entering primary school – is a critical element for success. In fact, research from around the globe shows that literacy skills are closely intertwined with the experiences children have with language and print from birth onwards.<sup>22</sup>

'Starting early' for literacy refers to focusing on emergent literacy skills, and the underlying socioemotional skills that are the foundation for long-term success for young children, ages 0-6 years.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup> Emergent literacy encompasses: oral language, expressed through speaking and listening; the understanding that print carries meaning; basic alphabet knowledge; early phonological awareness; and scribbling or emergent writing.<sup>26</sup>

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR READING AND LEARNING

Emergent literacy experiences form a foundation upon which children will build their future reading abilities and attitudes. Not only do these early activities help children to learn more complex skills later, but if these early experiences are fun, exciting, and enjoyable, they can set a positive direction for children's reading throughout life.

Research studies from both developed and developing countries have noted the importance of early childhood education – whether preschool, nursery or other early literacy activities – on children's

preparation for and success in primary school.<sup>27</sup>

A recent World Bank randomised impact evaluation of Save the Children's early childhood development programmes in rural Mozambique found that children who participated in preschool had higher levels of school-readiness and were significantly more likely to enrol in primary school at the appropriate age.<sup>28</sup>

Starting early helps children learn to read, and early investments have wide-ranging impact on national outcomes in education and beyond.<sup>29</sup> Numerous studies have demonstrated that pre-primary education is one of the most effective and cost-effective investments donors and governments can make.<sup>30, 31, 32, 33</sup> Further, starting early is crucial to ensuring that equitable learning outcomes are met for all children, as outlined in SDG 4.

However, in spite of the clear benefits of developing emergent literacy skills in the pre-primary years, there is a significant gap in global access to quality pre-primary education. Around the globe, 159 million children – nearly half of all three to six year olds – do not have access to early learning opportunities.<sup>34</sup> And although pre-primary enrolment has increased by 64 per cent since 1999, the availability and quality of these programmes has varied greatly, particularly across urban and rural locations, rich and poor communities, and in the least developed countries.<sup>35</sup>

In many contexts, children from low-income backgrounds are more likely not to attend preschool. Across 28 countries, data gathered by Save the Children showed that children who are not enrolled in preschool also have lower developmental outcomes.<sup>ix, 36</sup> Save the Children has seen this first-hand through its early childhood development project in Mozambique, where in 2012 only 4 per cent of the 4.5 million preschool-aged children were enrolled, and the

<sup>ix</sup> Data was collected using Save the Children's International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) tool, a rigorous global assessment instrument that measures children's school readiness.

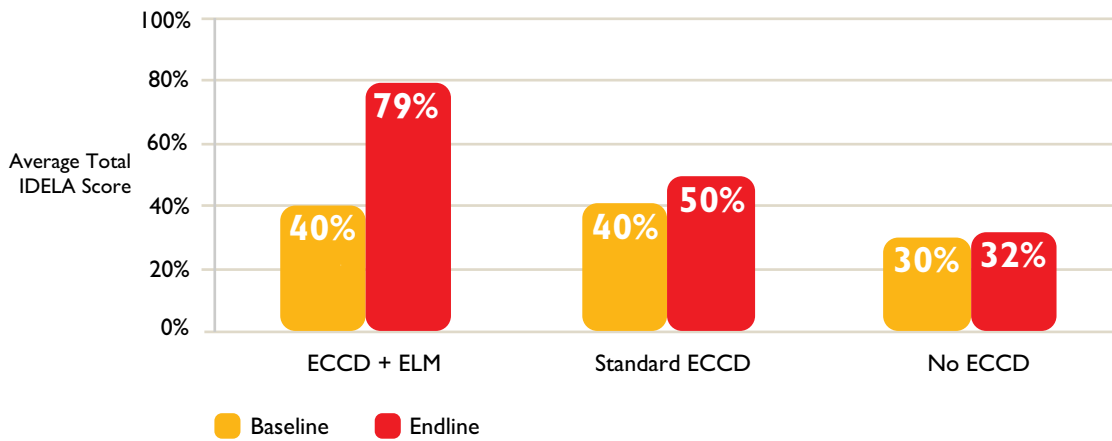
majority of these children were from more affluent families in urban areas.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, children living in communities without access to early childhood development centres or activities have been found to be at a higher risk of falling behind their peers in learning and development.<sup>38, 39, 40, 41</sup> More efforts are needed to ensure that every child has access to quality early learning and development opportunities.

## FINDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT EMERGENT LITERACY

Between 2012 and 2015, Save the Children explored new ways to specifically strengthen young children’s early literacy skills, working through early childhood care and development centres, and with parents. These evidence-based, low-cost interventions have proven successful in strengthening young children’s early literacy skills.

One of the most innovative solutions has been the Emergent Literacy and Maths (ELM) programme, currently in 15 countries.<sup>x</sup> Similar to best practice in primary school literacy instruction, young children benefit greatly from being playfully yet purposefully taught pre-literacy skills, rather than only being engaged in general learning or play activities. Thus, ELM includes targeted, play-based activities designed to support specific early literacy and maths skills development (Figure 3). The activities are easy to implement in low-resource settings and have proven to be more impactful than standard early learning programmes, which use a general learning approach, as seen below in Ethiopia.

**FIGURE 3** IMPACT OF ELM INTERVENTION, ETHIOPIA PROJECT SITE



Average baseline and endline early learning and development outcomes for Ethiopian children who were enrolled in ECCD centres that followed Save the Children’s Emergent Literacy and Maths (ELM) curriculum compared to children from standard ECCD centres and those who were not enrolled in ECCD. Children were assessed using Save the Children’s International Developmental and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA).<sup>42</sup>



Photo: Asad Zaidi

Hafizullah, a student at Government Primary School Imam Sari, Battagram, Pakistan, pointing at the alphabet.

<sup>x</sup> A Note on Emergent Maths: Among young learners, early reading, writing, maths, motor and socio-emotional skills develop concurrently and in an intertwined manner. Children do not first learn to read and then learn to count, sort or do patterns, cooperate or skip—these skills are often developed in parallel and are interrelated. Many of the issues discussed in the context of emergent literacy are relevant to how emergent maths and other skills are developed and the way they pave the way to more complex competencies in the early primary grades and beyond.



## SCALING-UP EARLY LEARNING IN MOZAMBIQUE AND BHUTAN



Save the Children began working in 12 community early childhood care and development (ECCD) centres in the Gaza Province of Mozambique in 2005. By 2012, the project had scaled-up and became the focus of a 2012 World Bank randomised evaluation, the first study of its kind in rural Africa. The study found that participation in the preschool programme resulted in significant improvements in child development outcomes, and children being better prepared for primary school.



As a result, the government of Mozambique expanded its pre-primary strategy in its national Strategic Education Plan (Estrategia de Desenvolvimento Integral da Crianca em idade pre-escolar, 2012-2021) and has received a US\$40m investment from World Bank. Looking ahead, the government of Mozambique is working through partners to expand community-based preschools, increasing the number of preschools from 350 to 600 communities across the nation by 2017.



In Bhutan, the government's five-year development plan, 2012-2017 now includes ECCD, which is an outcome of the collaborative work between the Ministry of Education and development partners, such as Save the Children and UNICEF, since 2008. During this time, Save the Children has developed ECCD programme models that address children's needs in a wide range of settings, including urban and rural settings, workplace ECCD centres for low-wage earning parents, and parenting education programmes. Save the Children has also worked with the Ministry of Education to develop an ECCD curriculum – which includes a focus on early literacy and language skills, training manuals and monitoring tools for the ECCD centre programme. The programme will be scaled-up in all government and non-government run ECCD centres nationwide, by 2017.

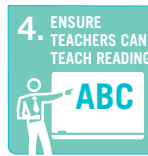


Photo: Susan Warner

Third grader Neusa, age 9, reads a book during the reading festival at her school in Mozambique.



Photo: Susan Warner

Save the Children is working with preschool teachers throughout Bhutan to introduce play-based learning activities.

Around the world, most children spend the majority of their early years at home with their caregivers, relatives, and older siblings, rather than in preschools. Parents and caregivers, even those who are illiterate, can provide children with excellent early language and literacy preparation during these first years. Therefore working with families is essential in order to develop children’s early literacy.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to preschool-based activities, ELM has piloted specific interventions for parents and caregivers in communities with and without ECCD centres in Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Bangladesh. The ELM parent education component teaches parents, at all levels of literacy, to support their children’s emergent literacy skills through everyday activities, such as talking, singing, playing, and asking questions.

In Bangladesh, Save the Children’s ELM programme encouraged parents to initiate simple activities with their infants and toddlers. An example would be: ‘start a conversation by copying your child’s sounds and gestures.’ As a result, children in the intervention group scored significantly higher than their peers in the comparison group on oral language.<sup>xi</sup> These emergent literacy and stimulation messages were delivered to parents through routine home visits by frontline government health workers, and show that even a small amount of time educating parents can result in important gains for children. These types of low-cost activities can and should be easily replicated in other low-resource settings with parents and families of younger or older children.

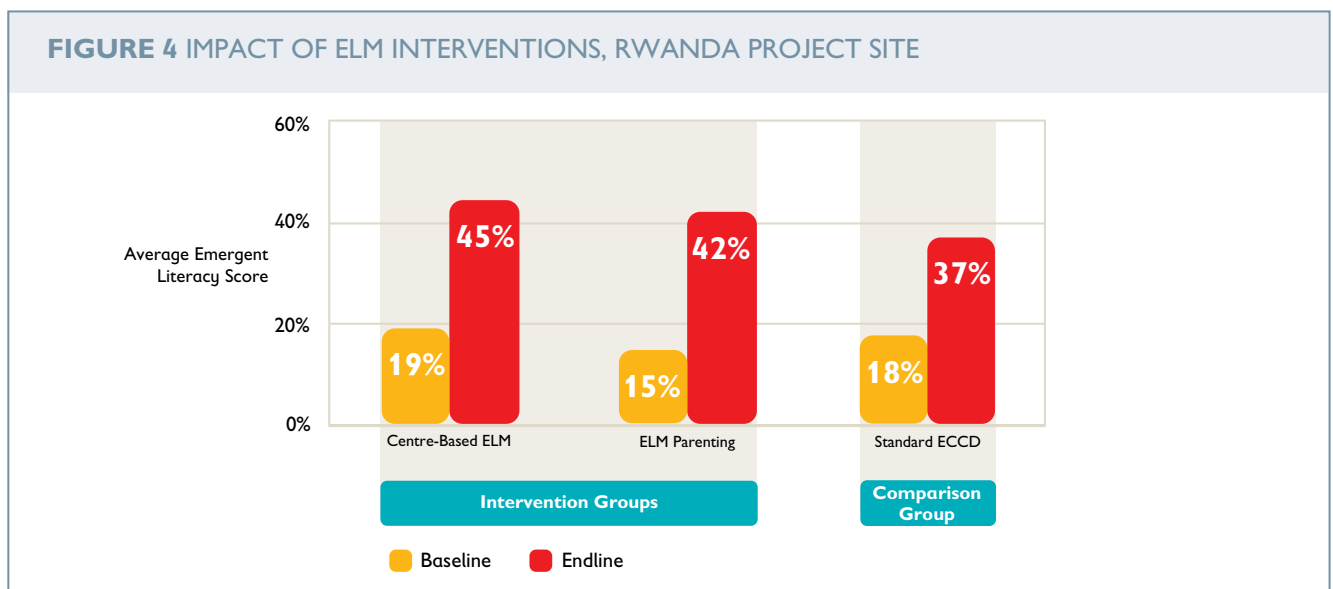
Evidence from Ethiopia has shown that combining emergent literacy programming with a parent education component can significantly improve children’s emergent literacy skills development. As seen in Figure 4, Rwandan children in two treatment

groups – one that was enrolled in Save the Children’s ELM centres and one that participated in Save the Children’s ELM parenting programme – made similar gains in literacy, and both groups gained more than a comparison group of children who were in traditional ECCD centres.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, a study in Ethiopia that analysed several ELM interventions found that learning gains for children in the ELM parenting interventions were the same as the gains made by children in standard government preschool classes.<sup>45</sup> In fact, children in the ELM-only and the ELM + parenting groups had statistically significant higher gains in emergent literacy skills.<sup>46</sup>

This is substantially important in Ethiopia because government-supported preschool programmes are being scaled-up but will not realise national coverage for many years, and the communities without preschool centres tend to be the hardest to reach. Results from this study suggest that 1) the ELM resource can improve government ECCD centre quality, 2) a strong parenting programme can help children in the most marginalised communities achieve stronger school readiness skills, and 3) a combination of strong parenting and strong centre-based programmes can give children the best chance to succeed in primary school.

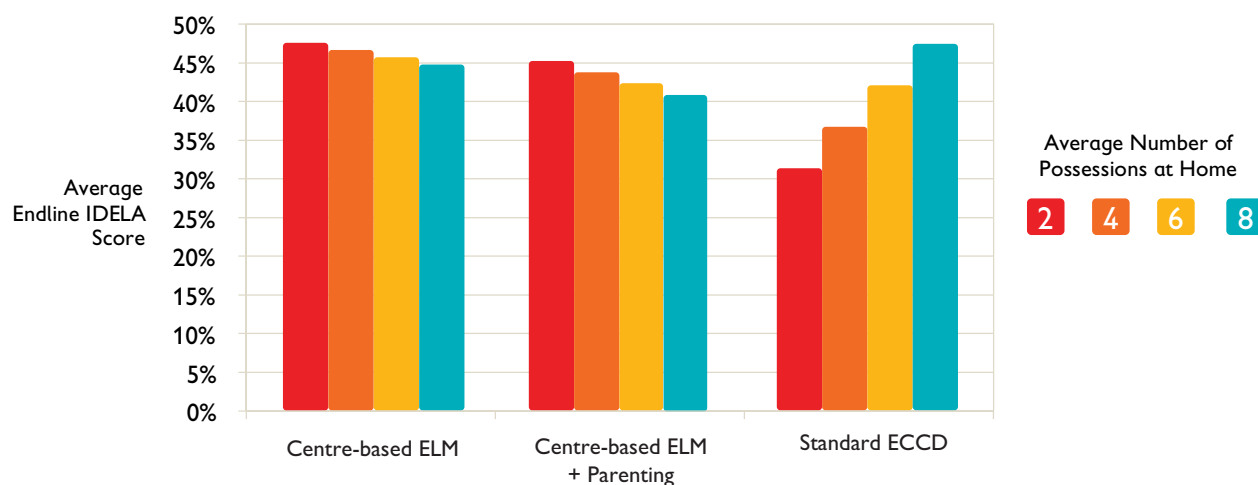
Additionally, in both Rwanda and Ethiopia, the ELM centre with a parenting programme produced strong learning gains on average and also helped children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) catch up with their peers by the end of preschool (see Figure 4).<sup>47</sup> As shown in Figure 5, children with the lowest SES in ELM centres and parenting groups have the highest endline outcomes on average, while the highest scores in comparison centres are among children with highest SES (measured by average number of possessions at home).<sup>48</sup>



Average emergent literacy scores at baseline (beginning of ECCD) and endline (middle of Grade 1) for children in Save the Children Rwanda’s Emergent Literacy and Maths (ELM) centre-based and home-based (parenting) programmes. Children were assessed using Save the Children’s International Developmental and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>xi</sup> Effect sizes for language gains range from 0.8 to 1.15 and for cognitive gains from 1.28 to 1.41. Source: Save the Children (2013). *Emergent Literacy: Investing early for exponential outcomes.*

**FIGURE 5** CORRELATION BETWEEN AVERAGE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, RWANDA PROJECT SITE



Save the Children's ELM and ELM + Parenting interventions at one site in Rwanda helped children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (measured by number of possessions at home, out of a list of eight) catch up with their peers developmentally. Children were assessed using Save the Children's International Developmental and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA).<sup>50</sup>

These results are encouraging, especially since the ELM parenting component in Rwanda and Ethiopia was much less resource-intensive than an ECCD centre-based programme, yet produced substantial learning gains for children. This is particularly important as these children did not have access to the centre-based early learning programmes that better prepare them to

thrive in primary school.<sup>51</sup> In a Value for Money analysis carried out by the Rwanda programme, the cost of the parenting intervention is estimated to be GBP 13 per child compared to GBP 23 per child for a government-supported centrebased intervention, or GBP 53 per child for centre-based initiatives requiring full NGO or private support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Governments and donors should develop and implement policies that support the development of children's emergent literacy skills from birth until they enter primary school.
- Governments should consider cost effective models for improving children's emergent literacy skills, such as parenting education and efforts to improve the home literacy environment such as book gifting, when scaling up early learning provision.
- Early Childhood Care and Development policies should recognise that parents of every level of literacy have an essential role to play in supporting children's early literacy development.
- ECCD workers should be trained in specific play based early literacy and maths and the early years curriculum where it exists should prioritise the development of these skills.
- Emergent literacy and maths should be part of a holistic approach to early childhood education that focuses on a range of essential school readiness skills.



## IT TAKES A VILLAGE: EMPOWERING PARENTS TO SUPPORT EMERGENT LITERACY IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, the First Read programme has taken a dual approach to supporting early literacy skills for 11,000 families with young children each year. The project is improving children's emergent reading skills by increasing the number of age-appropriate reading materials available to families and supporting parents to read with their young children, aged 0-6 years, more frequently and effectively.

When the First Read programme began, there was a significant shortage of culturally- and language-appropriate books for young children and beginning readers in Cambodia, as most books available were written in foreign languages or intended for advanced readers. To address this challenge, Save the Children staff shared guidance and best practices from children's literature with authors, illustrators and the national publishing industry, to increase their ability to publish high-quality, local-language books for young children, and make these books available in the local marketplace. These efforts served to meet an immediate need for reading material and will ensure sustainability after the project phases out by building the publishing industry's technical capacity.

Parents and children participating in First Read received book packets to read together. For many parents, this was the first time they were exposed to children's books. First Read staff supported families, especially mothers who participated in local mothers' groups, through sessions where parents gained child-development knowledge, as well as new techniques for how to read and interact with their children. Local government Commune Councils, especially the Commune Committees for Women and Children, and NGO partners, including Save the Children, provided additional support through home visits offering coaching, mentoring, and troubleshooting.



Photo: KJ Borja

3-year-old Ranty holds up a letter of the Khmer alphabet during a game in her Save the Children-supported preschool class in Cambodia. The game is designed to help her learn letter recognition and build her literacy skills.

Parents reflected that First Read generated positive results for themselves and their young children. They reported that the books and support received enabled them to stimulate their children's learning, and were useful for their own knowledge as well. As a result of the project, one parent commented, 'I know how to teach my children and grandchildren. They are smarter than before, can ask questions, speak to others, and open books.' Children who have been exposed to books through First Read's distribution have become more confident in turning the pages of books in the correct way, practising how to name and describe the pictures in the books, and learning new words and concepts through the illustrations.

In addition, First Read is now increasing awareness of, and capacity for, emergent literacy across Cambodia. Local government authorities are actively collaborating with First Read to mobilise public awareness and activities around children's books, community book reading sessions, school enrolment campaigns, and book-making sessions with parents.







Anupa and her younger brother Ashish, age 4, attend the Save the Children reading camp in their village in Nepal. The reading camp in the Rajiour Village is part of the Literacy Boost education programme. The camp was lead by volunteers trained by Save the Children and met once a week on Saturdays for two hours. This camp assisted approximately 35 students.

# PRINCIPLE 2: MORE AND BETTER BOOKS

***Children need a variety of age- and context-appropriate reading materials that spark their imagination and motivation to read, and build on their existing language skills.***

Globally, there is a shortage of age- and context-appropriate children's titles to support early grade reading. A recent study commissioned by USAID surveyed availability of local-language children's titles in eleven African countries, and identified a profound scarcity of early grade reading texts compared to more advanced levels.

The study observed a shortage of titles in many languages, with some countries of high linguistic diversity having a comparatively limited selection of local-language books. For example, in Nigeria, only six of 500 languages were represented among the materials collected. Even where books are available, there is a shortage of age-appropriate materials that reflect local context and enable children to build on familiar concepts and images.<sup>52</sup> Access to books is also a key equity issue, as children from wealthier backgrounds and those that speak majority languages are much more likely than their peers to have reading materials available to them.

In many countries there are weaknesses throughout the book supply chain, from publisher to child. Small national publishing industries struggle to sustain their activities and are primarily financed through textbook sales, leaving a scarcity of children's storybooks and graded reading series. Many lack the skills to effectively tailor reading materials for different age groups and/or different languages. USAID found that across the 11 survey countries, NGOs were the leading producers of children's books.<sup>53</sup> Schools often fail to access the books that are available due to lack of funds or poor understanding of procurement systems. And even when

books are present in schools and communities, teachers and parents may lack the skills to use them as effective teaching aides. Save the Children has found that for cultural or administrative reasons, books are often locked away and children cannot access them outside of formal lessons.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARIES

Save the Children views library systems as a key part of the 'book chain', which includes publishing, printing, distribution and bookselling, and accessibility to children. Where libraries exist, they should be viewed as essential in achieving early-grade reading and be incorporated into national literacy action plans. Where libraries do not exist, governments should actively consider how libraries, and their services, could be developed to support early-grade reading, as well as focus on extension programmes to ensure that school and community book collections have up-to-date, good quality materials that are managed effectively. Additionally, libraries and librarians play an important role in reading promotion, which is central to creating vibrant literacy environments for children.



## SAVE THE CHILDREN'S APPROACH TO INCREASING BOOK QUALITY, AVAILABILITY AND USE

Over the past four years, Save the Children has taken a two-pronged approach to increasing access to quality children's reading books. In Rwanda, Bhutan, Cambodia and the Philippines, Save the Children worked with governments and publishers to increase the supply of children's books and adapt existing books, with the goal of cultivating vibrant national publishing industries and providing a steady stream of new local-language titles. These programmes moved away from direct book

production, and emphasised the need for sustainable, profitable industries, which will guarantee availability of local-language, contextually relevant reading materials to support a culture of reading in the long term. Save the Children staff worked with education ministries, publishing industry stakeholders, education boards, schools, book sellers and libraries in order to strengthen existing systems and increase output and availability of quality books in local-languages. This **'whole chain' approach**, known as the International Children's Book Initiative, reviewed every step of a book's journey from authorship to child, and put in place measures to ensure effective and equitable production, distribution and use.<sup>xii</sup>

FIGURE 6 WHOLE CHAIN APPROACH



While testing this long-term approach, in many countries Save the Children also produced and disseminated reading materials to afford immediate access for children participating in Literacy Boost. The goal of this latter approach was to make available as many materials as possible in the shortest possible time, and Save the Children explored a number of options in order to achieve it. These included: direct work with teachers and communities to produce thousands of homemade reading materials; development of a digital library of 507 PowerPoint templates available for translation and adaptation across the world; partnership with young authors and illustrators from the US to expand the variety of illustrated templates;

printing and dissemination of copyright-free texts such as *Aesop's Fables*; and development of 80 translatable non-fiction titles, in partnership with the Bezos Foundation. In Uganda, the I'm Learning project included story workshops to support teachers to develop their own local-language reading materials. Stories were edited and laminated for teachers to take back to their classrooms, followed by monitoring visits to investigate how the materials were being used. In Nepal, books developed included a selection in Braille, and a selection translated into Tharu, in partnership with Room to Read. In all, Save the Children has supported the creation of more than 1,000 new reading materials across dozens of project sites.

<sup>xii</sup> The International Children's Book Initiative currently operates in Rwanda and Bhutan and in 2016 will expand to Bangladesh.



Photo: Asad Zaidi/Save the Children

**Najma, age 9, (left) and Muneeba, age 12, (right) are reading a story book borrowed from the book bank, a mobile library in their village in the Battagram District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. Muneeba joined school late and was a weak student in her class. When the reading buddy programme was introduced as part of Save the Children's Literacy Boost initiative, Muneeba was paired up with Najma who now helps her to read in and outside of school.**

Save the Children has recognised, through its programming, the difficulties in finding a balance between ensuring the provision of quality reading materials for children in the short-term, while also training and supporting local publishers to produce quality reading materials in the long-term. At programme launch, Save the Children conducted children's literature market surveys to understand and make use of already existing materials. However, in most cases few or no appropriate materials existed in the target languages, and our programmes therefore produced many materials directly alongside interventions in teacher training and community action

for reading, which would be unsuccessful without more abundant supplementary reading materials.

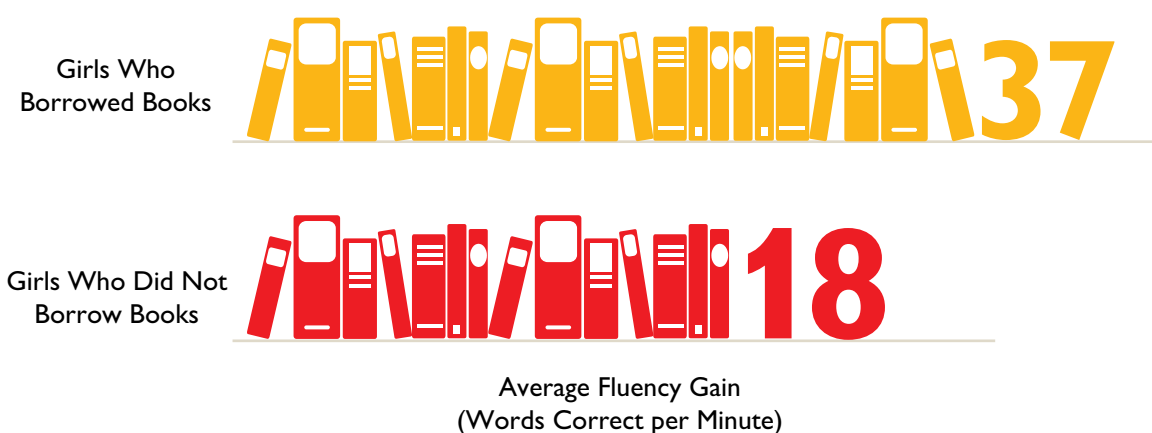
The impact of NGO-produced reading materials on local publishing industries has not yet been fully quantified. Save the Children produced books to meet an immediate need, in the hope that local industries would follow. There remains a significant range in terms of book availability and price in low-income countries, which does not necessarily correlate to level of NGO activity. Further work is needed to understand the interplay between local publishers and the work of international NGOs to distribute centrally-developed, but locally adapted materials.

## RESULTS FROM PROVIDING MORE AND BETTER BOOKS

Save the Children’s work during the 2012-2015 focus on literacy demonstrated that the availability of high quality, age-appropriate reading materials is essential to improve literacy outcomes. In Rwanda, the Children’s Book Initiative established Classroom Book Collections within lower primary classrooms across 91 schools. Schools which benefited from the book initiative, with only two-days of teacher training, had higher average end-of-intervention reading scores compared to children

in schools without the book initiative, and children’s literacy habits, both in school and at home, improved significantly during the initiative.<sup>54</sup> In an Ethiopia Literacy Boost site, girls who reported that they had ever borrowed books from the Literacy Boost book bank had higher fluency scores, on average, than girls who did not, and were equivalent to boys in terms of fluency levels (Figure 7). Similarly, in Indonesia, children who reported borrowing more books from a Literacy Boost book bank in the week before the endline assessment exhibited higher scores on fluency and reading comprehension (Figure 8).

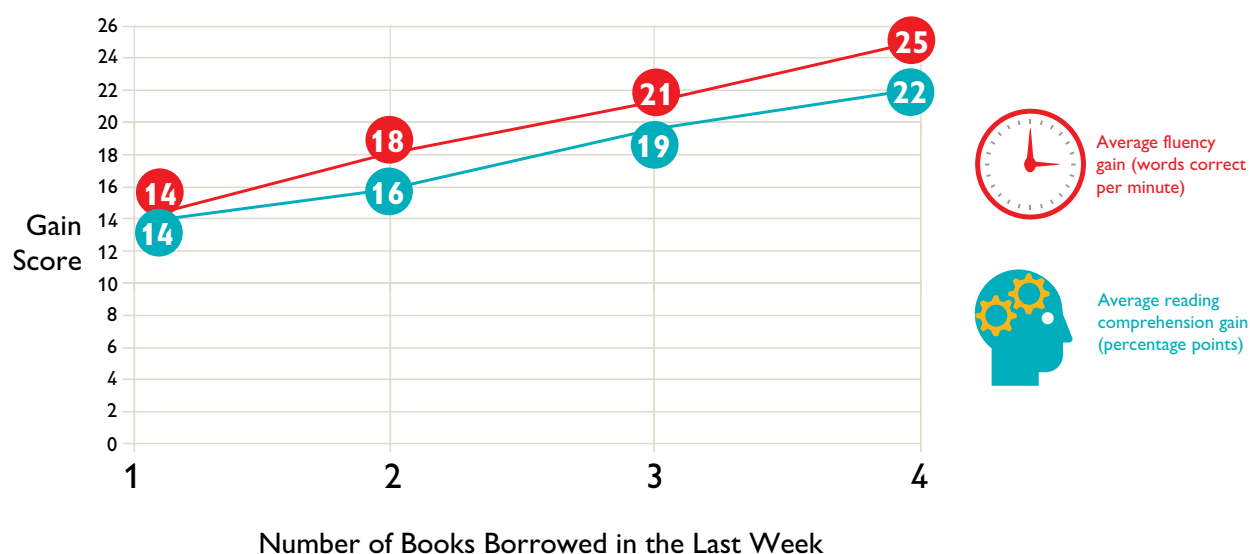
**FIGURE 7** CORRELATION BETWEEN BOOK BORROWING AND GIRLS’ FLUENCY GAINS, ETHIOPIA PROJECT SITE



Though girls on average did not improve their fluency as much as boys in this Literacy Boost Ethiopia project site, girls who borrowed books from a Literacy Boost book bank had higher average gains in fluency compared to those who did not.<sup>55</sup>



(L-R) Samrawit, age 9, Mahlet, age 9, and Belaynesh, age 8, read books together during a weekly session of Save the Children’s Donkey Library project in the Lay Armacheho village in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. In 2011, Save the Children piloted the donkey library project as part of its long-term education programme in Ethiopia.

**FIGURE 8** BOOK BORROWING AND READING SKILLS GAINS, INDONESIA PROJECT SITE

Borrowing more books is associated with higher gains in fluency and reading comprehension in this Literacy Boost project site in Indonesia.<sup>56</sup>

## HOW CAN MORE AND BETTER BOOKS BE MADE AVAILABLE?

Save the Children's work in Rwanda, Bhutan, Cambodia and the Philippines demonstrates the value of a **'whole chain' approach** to book supply, working with publishing industry actors to increase the quality of materials, while ensuring that measures are in place to maximise their effective dissemination and use. Drawing on this experience, Save the Children proposes that effective national book supply policies must include measures in four key areas – **quality, market demand, access, and use**.

In order to address quality, measures are needed which will build capacity of stakeholders throughout the publishing process, including writers, illustrators, editors, graphic designers and marketers. Support should focus on the design and production process in order to produce books that are culturally relevant and in local-language. It should also address wider systemic issues such as the 'trade-in-rights' laws which govern procurement, translation and marketing of books from abroad, and which are poorly understood by many publishers. Governments should develop minimum standards to guide production of books for use in schools, and ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place to review and approve new titles on an ongoing basis.

The USAID-funded READ project in Bangladesh is an example of increasing book availability by working with the government to review and approve new titles. Save the Children partnered with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) to develop a national book-leveling process, as one way to improve the quality, quantity and availability of supplementary reading materials in schools. Together with NCTB, Save the Children convened an independent expert group, which reviewed more than 5,000 potential texts. The exercise resulted in government approval of around 160 books that are now available in the local book market, for use in primary schools. If deployed to schools nationwide, they will benefit up to 16 million enrolled primary-school aged children.<sup>57</sup> A similar exercise has taken place in Ethiopia where 601 materials were approved. In Rwanda, Save the Children supported the development of over 100 new high-quality titles by publishers that can be integrated into classroom instruction.

To encourage **market demand**, governments and donors should consider advance purchase commitments, providing publishers with a reasonable assurance of profit to enable them to invest in new products. Save the Children piloted this approach in Rwanda and Bhutan. In Rwanda, Save the Children made an initial advance market commitment, allowing publishers to print large quantities of stock while simultaneously investing in new book production. This has further enabled local publishers to successfully compete for government tenders for the first time.

To afford **access**, governments and donors should consider how books are made available to children in their schools and communities. Schools should be supported to put in place book storage policies, to protect their materials and at the same time afford access. Teachers should be supported to set up classroom book banks and reading corners and to encourage children to read inside school. Communities should be mobilised to support out-of-school reading through reading clubs, literacy events and management of communal book banks. Booksellers need support to develop distribution channels, in order to make reading materials available outside of urban areas.

Finally, **effective use** can be encouraged by training parents and teachers to engage children with

reading materials, by reading aloud, listening to children read, asking questions, highlighting important vocabulary and relating it to familiar objects and concepts. Even larger gains would be leveraged by combining teacher training on book use with training on the component skills of reading (see Principle 4: Ensuring Teachers Can Teach Reading).

Throughout the above, working in partnership proved to be key to success. In every country where Save the Children worked, it was necessary to collaborate with numerous institutions including local and national government, publishers, book sellers, libraries and schools, as well as teachers and parents in order to understand the book supply chain and put in place measures to improve it.



Photo: Save the Children

In Somalia, Save the Children also experimented with innovative approaches to distributing books to remote areas. In Somaliland and Puntland, 'camel libraries' were established to provide access to reading materials for pastoralist and agro-pastoralist children. Camels were provided by local communities, while books and incentives for the librarians were contributed by Save the Children. In many countries, Save the Children established book banks or borrowing libraries, managed by rural schools and communities, to increase the circulation of reading materials.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Invest in an abundance of interesting materials for children to practice reading with.
- Build capacity in the local publishing industry, including by supporting authors, illustrators, editors and publishers as part of a comprehensive policy to stimulate book production.
- Produce guidance to help ensure that children's books are age and culturally appropriate and available in local languages.
- Use advance purchase commitments to support local publishers produce new titles in the knowledge that their titles will be purchased when they are brought to market.
- Support the book sector to showcase their products and identify new book dissemination channels.
- Allocate funds for book buying within national and local education budgets and ensure that a proportion of grants made to schools are used for purchasing books.
- Incorporate guidance on effective book use within teacher training programmes on teaching reading.
- Ensure schools have the support and skills necessary to manage their book collection.
- Identify how the national and local library system where it exists can support children's access to books and strengthen the local literate environment.
- Support parents to use books at home with their children and ensure that children have access to books outside of school.
- Develop a national book policy, aimed at creating an enabling environment for book development, dissemination and use.



## USING BOOKS IN RWANDA TO ADVANCE CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO READ

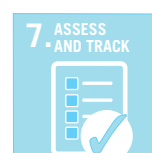
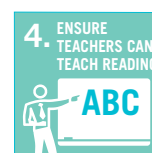
In Rwanda, the Advancing the Right to Read programme aims to establish a continuum of support to children aged 0-9 years, to ensure that every child leaves primary school able to read. The programme is an example of the '8 Principles' in action, and the model combines teacher training, community-based reading activities, increasing access to quality reading materials, and starting early – with formal and informal services targeting children's emergent literacy skills development from birth.

A particular area of innovation for the programme was its work to embed a fully functional 'book chain', to ensure high quality children's reading materials are produced, delivered and effectively used by children as infants and through the early primary grades. The programme aimed to navigate the complex set of stakeholders involved in book production and use, uniting them behind a common goal to improve children's reading opportunities. Save the Children's baseline assessment identified a lack of appropriate reading materials available to children, with children's books found in fewer than one in ten homes, and an average of three storybooks per school. This reflected the shortage of books produced in Kinyarwanda that target children of primary age and below – only 231 titles were on the market targeting early primary students, and only 16 titles on the market for children aged 0-6 years. Furthermore, of those that were on the market, less than 40 per cent were identified as 'good' and only 4 per cent as 'excellent' when ranked against quality criteria. The baseline also explored attitudes towards reading, noting that very few students reported reading for pleasure.

Save the Children worked with the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and publishers to increase the number of approved Kinyarwanda storybooks. The process began with agreeing set criteria for the approval of new books, after which a variety of capacity building approaches were used to support different actors in the publishing industry, such as writers, illustrators and editors from local publishing companies to develop new content to meet the standards and expand the range of books and styles used. Publishers were initially encouraged to mass produce books through a purchase guarantee, and supported to develop a network of potential customers. In order to increase demand for reading and support the uptake of new materials, a component on book use was included in teacher training. Parent-teacher committees were encouraged to work with schools to provide a better variety of books. Schools were also supported to put in place book storage policies, to promote open access, while ensuring security of resources.

As a result of the programme, a total of 99 new Kinyarwanda titles were put on the market during 2014-2015. These included books for babies through to children in early primary. The demand for books was clearly illustrated by increased regular reading among children in programme locations.

The programme demonstrated the impact of a whole-system approach to strengthening the book sector. With extra capacity throughout the book chain, the publishing sector was effectively able to produce more and better books. It also revealed further work is needed to support local publishers to flourish. While the number of REB-approved storybooks increased by more than 40 per cent, there is a need to sustain the supply, requiring ongoing capacity-building of stakeholders within the publishing industry to enable them to manage the process and address children's continuous need for books. There is also a need for ongoing support to develop sustainable demand for books, in order for publishers' businesses to remain viable.







Students take time to read with a selection from the library box of books at their school in Mozambique.

# PRINCIPLE 3: ENGAGE PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES



**Parents and community members need to be engaged to support children's language development and reading skills.**

In developing contexts, students sometimes spend as little as 11 per cent of their waking time in a school classroom, and an even smaller portion of that in-school time is devoted to improving reading skills.<sup>58</sup> As a result, it is critical to maximise the time that children can spend on reading outside of school. One way to do this is to engage with parents and communities so that more children can gain the core skills they need to learn to read.

During the last few years, Save the Children has expanded the concept of 'opportunity to learn' to include time outside of school, both at home and in the community.<sup>59</sup> This is referred to as *life-wide learning* – children's engagement in enjoyable, cognitively-demanding activities, not only while in school, but also throughout the rest of the day, every day.<sup>60</sup>

## DEVELOPING COMMUNITY READING ACTIVITIES TO INSPIRE LIFE-WIDE LEARNING

When Save the Children first began researching literacy acquisition in 2008, nearly all extant academic research came from contexts where children lived and learned in print-rich environments. However, programme experience in developing countries showed a different picture of learning environments which were often devoid of print.<sup>61</sup> Households generally had few literate adults or older siblings who could serve as reading role models. As a result, Save the Children

began to explore home and community-based reading activities as a means to increase the availability of print and presence of reading role models in developing-country learning environments.

Developed in 2009, the Literacy Boost Community Action component includes a list of community activities that programmes could choose to implement in their contexts:

- **Book Banks** are mobile school and community libraries filled with around 150 titles, including published books, as well as informal, locally-produced books and stories, which children can borrow and read at home or use in other community reading activities.
- **'Reading buddies'** is a weekly activity that pairs an older child with a younger child to read together.
- **Reading Clubs** (also called Reading Camps) are weekly gatherings, led by a trained community volunteer using a guided curriculum, that offer story read-alouds, word and letter games, and journal writing to make reading, writing and drawing fun for children.<sup>xiii</sup>
- **Reading Celebrations** including festivals, book fairs, and other activities that promote and celebrate reading.
- **Parent Education Workshops** offer concrete strategies that literate and illiterate parents can incorporate into their daily lives to support their children's language and reading skill development.<sup>62</sup>

Each of these community-based literacy activities supports a different facet of children's literacy acquisition. This can vary from improving children's language development to increasing children's exposure to age-appropriate books, providing an opportunity for children to practise reading and writing skills with others, and empowering parents and caregivers to support their children's reading. Save the Children's Community Strategies for Promoting Literacy flipbook, translated into 16 languages, highlights many of these daily strategies.<sup>63</sup>

The Literacy Boost Community Action component draws from the work of other organisations like

Pratham, which has long been leading community-based reading camps. It also draws on Save the Children's own country programmes' experiences, particularly in Bangladesh. Our work there in Reading for Children and Writing for Children spread in the early 2000s to a dozen sites and was adopted by the Aga Khan Foundation. In the years since, many more of Save the Children's basic education programmes have incorporated community reading activities and are successfully leveraging time outside of school. This is especially important in supporting children's reading efforts where the number of hours children spend in school is relatively low.



## ENGAGING COMMUNITIES THROUGH READING CAMPS AND RADIO IN MALAWI

In Malawi, Save the Children's *Tiwerenge Ndi Ana Athu* (TiANA) project, funded by USAID, is an example of how intensive community reading activities can support children's reading skills and engage an entire community in the joy of reading and learning.

TiANA, the Chichewa title of which translates to 'Let us read together with our children' established reading camps in the villages surrounding 10 project schools. The weekly reading camp sessions were usually held outside in a shared community space and led by community members using a scripted curriculum. The sessions were fun, weekly gatherings where children in grades 1-4 could practise their reading and writing skills through playing word games, singing songs, reading and writing stories, and borrowing books to take home.

Not only did these vibrant reading camp sessions build children's enthusiasm and love for reading, but they also helped to improve children's reading skills. The project's endline results show that learners made gains in all core reading skills in Chichewa, the local-language, with the most significant gains in reading accuracy and vocabulary.<sup>64</sup> Even more impressive, by the end of this two-year project, nearly 10,000 students had made progress in learning to read.<sup>65</sup>

The TiANA project also used radio to spread the camps' reach to even more children and their families. Save the Children partnered with a local radio station, Zodiak Broadcasting, to broadcast reading camp activities, which helped to reinforce the reading activities for children and bring the activities to more learners. The broadcasts would often showcase 'star readers,' which increased participation and attendance in reading camps by 30 per cent over the course of one year.

The reading camps and the radio broadcasts had a galvanising effect by engaging communities in early grade reading. Parents reported that having listened with their children to the radio broadcasts, they felt more able to get involved as their children learned to read. Teachers remarked on improvements in students' ability to read as a result of the reading camps and broadcasts. Community groups and village chiefs took ownership of the reading camps and began regularly attending and participating in community meetings to make decisions about the radio broadcasts. While the radio broadcasts concluded, the reading camp activities have continued even after the project's conclusion.



## CREATING A ‘CULTURE OF READING’ TO FOSTER READING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Research shows that the home literacy environment – the availability of books, print materials and readers in the home – and opportunities to read outside of school have a positive impact on children’s reading skill development.<sup>66</sup> In response, many of Save the Children’s literacy activities now occur beyond school walls, taking place in the home and community.

Save the Children’s own research has found that the relationship between the home literacy environment and reading skills is important in low-resource contexts. A 2013 analysis of Literacy Boost data found a positive relationship between the home literacy environment and primary grade reading skills in five of six countries surveyed.<sup>67</sup>

The same relationship has been demonstrated for emergent literacy skills in preschool-age children. In Bhutan, four and five year-olds from richer home learning environments have significantly stronger early learning and development outcomes than children growing up in homes with fewer learning and play interactions (Figure 9).

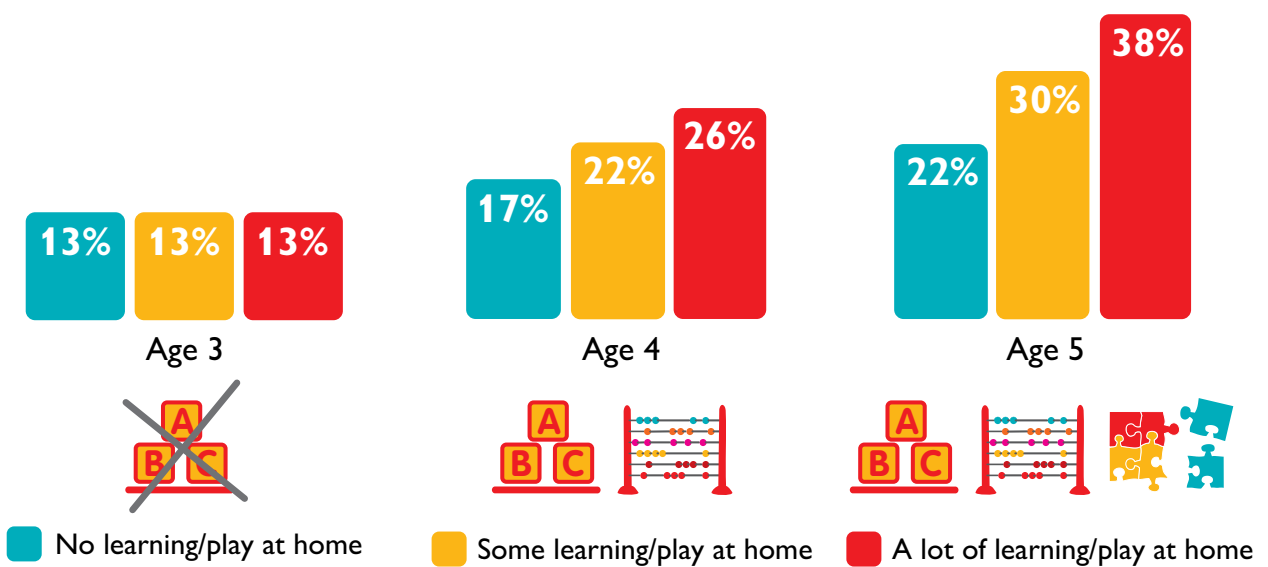
Our evidence also shows that involving parents and community members in literacy programming is key to changing attitudes and creating a ‘reading culture’ that extends beyond the classroom. Across four

mixed-method studies in Indonesia, Nicaragua, Bangladesh and Rwanda, Save the Children has found that the value placed by parents and community members on early literacy was high in communities that had parent and community engagement programme components.<sup>68, 69, 70, 71</sup>

Additionally, three of the four studies asked parents how their home reading and literacy strategies had changed because of Save the Children’s programmes. They found that most parents could articulate positive changes in their or other household members’ behaviours with their children, as a result of the programmes.<sup>72, 73, 74</sup>

Children’s engagement in reading activities outside of school also strengthens their reading abilities. In 2015, an in-depth analysis of factors that predicted reading gains in eight Literacy Boost project sites revealed a strong positive correlation between participation in out-of-school reading activities such as book borrowing, reading buddies and reading clubs and children’s progress in fluency, letters and reading comprehension (see Figure 10). These findings highlight the significant role that out-of-school reading activities can play in supporting children’s reading achievement. The community setting is an enabling environment for learning, and must be cultivated to offer children ample opportunities to practise reading inside and outside the classroom.

**FIGURE 9** CORRELATION BETWEEN HOME LEARNING / PLAY ACTIVITIES AND EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES, BHUTAN



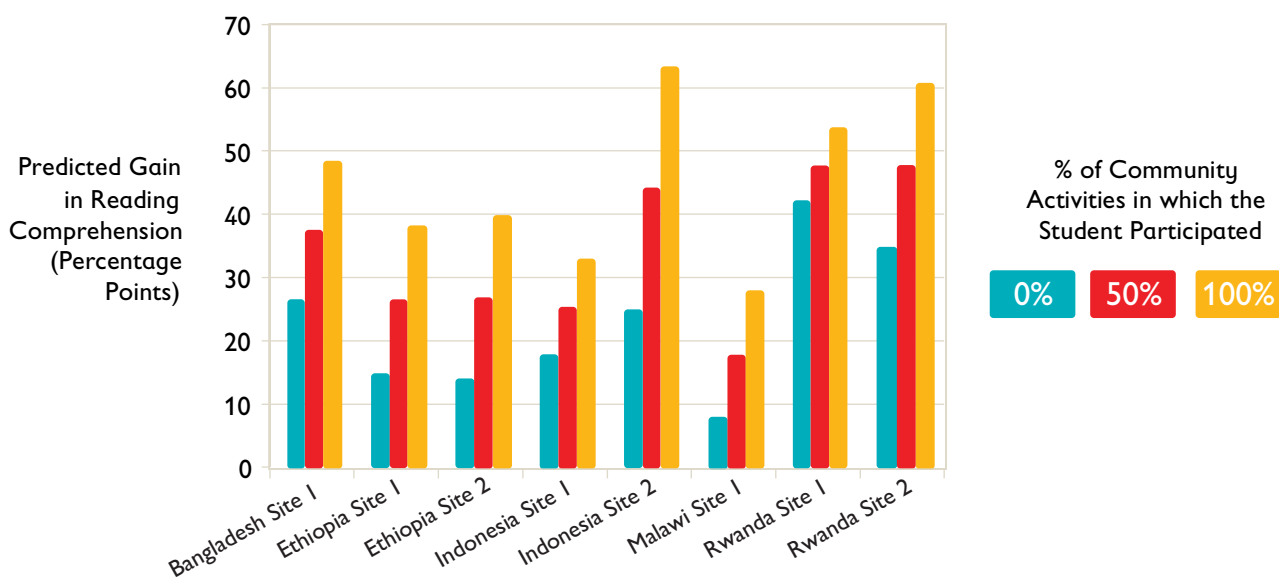
A national baseline study led by Save the Children in Bhutan revealed that four and five year-olds who have more learning and play interactions with household members exhibit significantly stronger early learning and development outcomes than children growing up in homes where learning and play are less frequent.<sup>75</sup>



Photo: Susan Warner/Save the Children

Save the Children staff member, Nelson, leads a parent education discussion in Chimondzo, Mozambique.

**FIGURE 10** CORRELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY-BASED READING PRACTICE AND READING COMPREHENSION IN MULTIPLE LITERACY BOOST SITES



A 2015 analysis of factors that predict reading gains across 12 Literacy Boost project sites revealed a strong positive correlation between participation in out-of-school reading activities and children’s progress in reading comprehension, as well as letter knowledge and fluency (not shown), in eight of the sites. Gains shown are predicted average gains after controlling for children’s age, sex, socioeconomic status, home learning environment, and other relevant background characteristics.<sup>76</sup>

## SUSTAINING COMMUNITY READING INTERVENTIONS

Save the Children's experience in implementing and adapting home and community literacy activities in local contexts has illuminated both the promise of and the constraints around working at community level. Save the Children's reading programmes, and Literacy Boost in particular, have sought to operationalise research from developed countries on the importance of the home literacy environment, alongside community-based reading activities.

Despite the known importance of these activities, in practice, Save the Children has noted the difficulty of sustaining community-based reading activities over the long term, when these activities have been initiated by a single NGO. Printed materials often deteriorate from constant use within a year or two; community volunteers move on; new volunteers need to be trained; and busy parents attend few sessions and do not find the time to try new activities.

Where innovations in teacher training can be institutionalised and scaled in partnership with ministries of education, sustaining community action is less straightforward. The key constraint has been finding appropriate, in-country partners that can take over these activities. The ministries of education are often poorly equipped to conduct community mobilisation; local NGOs have limited reach and need external funding to sustain the work; and other governmental agencies may lack the mandate or interest.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Save the Children's Country Offices explored a range of options for institutionalising community outreach for reading within local structures, such as national youth organisations, teacher training institutes, libraries, radio stations, text messaging services, and mothers' groups. To date, these efforts have expanded the reach of these activities and have introduced a measure of sustainability, but have yet to be proved fully successful at scale.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and emergent literacy are areas where Save the Children has begun to realise the potential for sustainable community-based programmes. In Rwanda, the Ministry of Health has approached Save the Children to contribute to the training of community health workers to deliver messages to new parents around the importance of, and strategies for, reading and emergent literacy skills development. In the United States, Save the Children's Early Steps to School Success, an ECCD programme, incorporates home visits from Early Childhood Coordinators, hired locally in their community, and trained by Save the Children's Child Development and Literacy Experts. The Early Childhood Coordinators identify at-risk families with young children and provide education on supporting their young child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, while emphasising the importance of early literacy skills and pre-school readiness.

Looking forward, Save the Children will continue to explore options for delivering community action at scale. This will include targeting support at first time parents and language minorities, and exploring the potential for broader behaviour change communication strategies. With USAID funding in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Bangladesh, Save the Children is exploring avenues to improve the ministries of education's abilities to work with communities to support children's reading, with the aim of incorporating community action as part of broader national literacy campaigns.

In addition to studying how to deliver community action at scale, we are also collecting data on the relative benefits of community approaches to literacy compared to school-based interventions. Save the Children is currently involved in four randomised control trials in Latin America (Guatemala and Peru), Africa (Rwanda) and Asia (Bangladesh) that will test the added value of community literacy activities compared to the value of teacher training alone. This research will help to identify the most cost-effective interventions, document best practice, and bring on board partners able to take these activities to scale.

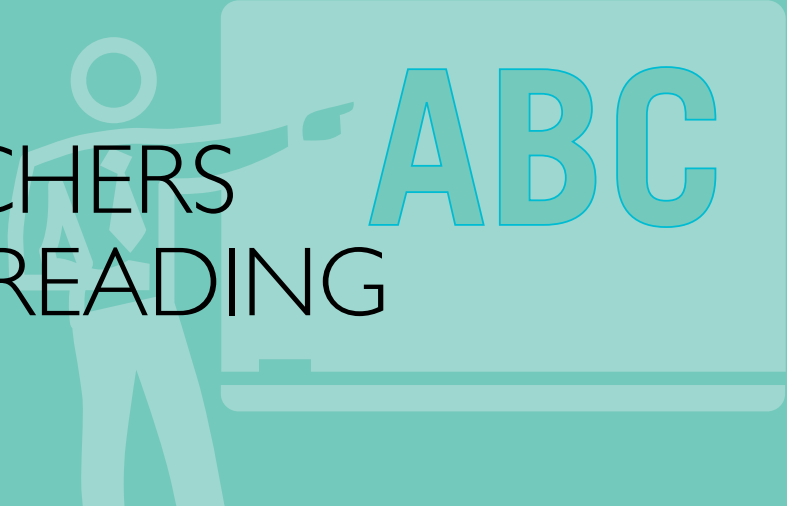
## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Governments should commit to developing a national culture of reading, including by leading multi-stakeholder efforts involving government ministries, including but not only Ministries of Education, civil society and the private sector.
- Reading initiatives and the policies that underpin them must work across society and across sectors targeting children's early, primary and adolescent years and at all stages working with parents and the wider community, focusing simultaneously on what happens in school and promoting reading outside of it.
- Donors and national governments should increase research designed to determine the most cost-effective community based interventions that have the biggest impact in improving children's reading outcomes.

A reading camp facilitator, supports a student reading a short fable during a reading club activity in the Chingwenembe village in Malawi.



# PRINCIPLE 4: ENSURE TEACHERS CAN TEACH READING



***Teachers need to be trained and supported in explicit and systematic reading instruction, using the five components skills of early reading.***

Teachers are central to any successful effort to improve literacy outcomes. However, in many low-income countries across the world, pre-service and in-service training does not include explicit instruction on reading. Instead, training is often designed with the assumption that if teachers are well versed in pedagogical theory and a range of pedagogical skills, they will automatically be able to deliver the curriculum content. In fact, teachers' knowledge of how to teach the five core skills of reading is an equally important determinant of how much children learn. A lack of pedagogical content knowledge, in this case pedagogy that is specific to reading, can make the difference between whether or not a child learns to read.<sup>77, 78</sup>

Inadequate pre- and in-service teacher training for reading is set against a backdrop of multiple systemic challenges. Often in developing countries or those experiencing conflict, disasters, or other difficulties, the teaching profession is characterised by high turnover and challenged motivation as teachers struggle to meet targets, while receiving low salaries and coping with ever-increasing class sizes. School populations are increasing faster than teacher supply, and a global trend towards use of paraprofessionals to reduce costs can sometimes decrease the quality and the status of the profession in many contexts. The training of teachers is often separated from the

practice and teachers are not given opportunities to strengthen their skills in the classroom. There is a strong desire for education systems to establish continuous professional development strategies, however, the financial resources allocated to training are minimal, and many education ministries lack capacity to provide effective support. In this context, the task of improving the practice of hundreds of thousands of teachers worldwide is a daunting one.<sup>79</sup>

## ADAPTING TRAINING METHODS TO STRENGTHEN TEACHERS' SKILLS

The evidence of a global learning crisis, which began emerging across the world in the mid-2000s, informed significant changes to Save the Children's approach to teacher training. In particular, there were two critical realisations that informed adaptations of Save the Children's model. The first was that teachers require explicit instruction in the five core reading skills (see text box on pg. 16, in Literacy Boost section) in order to be able to teach reading effectively. Where Save the Children's training content had previously focused on child-centred and active teaching methodologies, it was updated to include specific instruction on how to teach children to read.<sup>80</sup>

The second was the need for a new training modality. In 2005-2008, a body of evidence was emerging from World Bank and others that questioned the efficacy of one-off trainings.<sup>81</sup> It suggested the need for a more intensive approach, supporting teachers through a cycle of learning, enacting, assessing and reflection.<sup>82</sup> It also suggested a need for collective, whole school effort founded on the belief that every child, given the right support, can learn to read. If continuous teacher training is not supported and there is a lack of experienced teachers to assist and mentor new teachers, then newly trained teachers will struggle to apply what they learned in their trainings.<sup>83</sup>





Photo: Colin Crowley/Save the Children

Save the Children Donkey Library facilitator, Birtukan Chebun, helps Adnan Mulat, age 8, during a weekly reading session in the Lay Armacheho village in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. Birtukan says, “I like my job because I am doing it for the community. What motivates me most is to see people who couldn’t read and write learning to read and write. I am educated and I want children to be educated like me as they will be able to support their family and their community.”

A key component of Save the Children’s response was to develop the Literacy Boost model, which has been implemented in 30 countries. Literacy Boost’s approach to teacher training is built on five essential principles. Teacher training should be: regular; short (each session not more than half a day); local to the teachers’ place of work; reflective; and practical. The Literacy Boost programme places emphasis on the value of teachers’ understanding of, and reflection on, their own practice. It provides teachers with the skills to design their own lessons, as opposed to offering pre-prepared scripts, aiming to support professional development and cultivate skills that can be applied to any curriculum. It also uses a balanced scorecard approach to formative assessment in the classroom, to support teachers to understand and respond to pupils’ individual learning needs.

Literacy Boost was not the only model implemented by Save the Children to improve teaching practice. In Haiti, Save the Children took a different approach altogether, in partnership with USAID. With no official national curriculum consistently being implemented by schools, Save the Children worked with Dr. Sandra Hollingsworth to develop an approach based on the Systematic Method for Reading Success (SMRS). In Uganda and Indonesia Literacy Boost was incorporated as one component of longer training programmes, which focused on foundational pedagogical skills in the first year and introduced the reading content in year two.

Another training method was developed in Egypt, where Save the Children worked in coordination with governorate and district education offices to construct the Pivotal Schools Project, a cascade teacher training

model, which supported the Ministry of Education’s strategic plan, and the educational decentralisation policy in Egypt. This model, which was a foundation of Save the Children’s Arabic Booster project to improve children’s Arabic reading and writing skills, used a geographically central ‘pivotal’ school to provide teacher training in pedagogy, classroom management and assessment. An expert group of teacher trainers further disseminated the training content to their peers in the surrounding area. While Save the Children was not able to critically evaluate these different approaches against each other, it was observed that each was able to produce improvements in children’s reading by emphasising explicit instruction of core reading skills. At the same time, each approach encountered similar challenges in successful implementation, some of which are described in the following section.

## LESSONS FROM TRAINING TEACHERS IN READING

Despite this success in adapting and replicating teacher training methods across contexts, several challenges remain. The ‘ideal’ programme approach often became diluted in practice. For example in many contexts it was difficult to implement regular training due to multiple competing calls on teachers’ time. Thus, in many countries, the schedules reverted to less frequent and longer trainings than suggested by Ministry of Education staff. In response, Save the Children explored strategies such as video trainings to strengthen content delivery, and increased its focus on coaching and mentoring.

A further challenge was capacity. The most common modality for Literacy Boost is to train local ministry staff as master trainers, who then train teachers. Most projects during the 2012-2015 focus on literacy were designed on the assumption that local ministry staff would then provide classroom-based support to teachers as part of their regular responsibilities. However, this assumption did not hold. Analysis of the problem suggested the following reasons: (a) pedagogical support to teachers was often outside formal job responsibilities; (b) lack of foundation skills among local ministry staff in providing pedagogical support; and (c) technical content that was too dense for local ministry staff to digest and translate into practical support for classroom teachers. As a result, Save the Children invested in additional training for administrators, and examined ways to refine and present the content.

A final challenge was around the implementation of formative assessment and individualised instruction. Across project locations, the introduction of formative assessment in reading was a challenge, and instances of successful uptake by teachers were rare. Our analysis identified three key issues.

Firstly, large class sizes meant that teachers were unable to individually assess each child in the time available. Second, in all the locations where Save the Children worked, the early grade curriculum was textbook-based, as opposed to an integrated curriculum. As a result, teachers' main focus, and the metric they are most often inspected for, was coverage of the textbook content. Teachers therefore had to ensure they covered the entire textbook during the course of the year, providing very little incentive (or even a negative incentive) to understand and respond to the needs of individual children, or groups of children, in their classrooms.

Third, formative assessment tools and techniques often are not tailored to the realities facing teachers. Save the Children, for example, used a 'balanced scorecard' tool to help teachers track their formative assessment results and monitor children's progress in developing core reading skills. However, even this tool often proved too burdensome in large classes, and in some cases was an additional distraction from teaching and learning.

In light of the above challenges, a future goal for Save the Children's literacy programmes is to ensure formative assessment is consistently reinforced through teacher professional development, in order to gradually improve teachers' practice in this area.

## IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF READING AT SCALE

Save the Children's work over the past four years has demonstrated that it is possible to significantly improve the teaching of reading in a wide variety of contexts worldwide. However, in relation to the

global magnitude of the teaching quality issue, NGO programmes are on a small scale, and there is more work to be done to support governments to replicate local successes.

Institutionalisation of effective teacher training on reading will rely on the availability of simple, cost-effective models which are relatively easy for ministries of education to deliver at scale. Across the international education sector, more work is needed to measure the comparative impact of teacher training components and to identify the most effective elements and package them for scale-up. In particular, Save the Children has identified a need to adapt the Literacy Boost model to include fewer lectures and more interactive exercises, giving teachers hands-on experience with the instructional techniques they are learning. Resources need to be simplified to deliver only the most important points which will have the most impact, without requiring teachers to master radically different pedagogies and materials. Training packages should be suitable for local delivery, and trainers should be able to provide a full package of support to teachers, including lesson observation, feedback and coaching skills, and establishment of peer networks, as well as formal training.

Institutionalisation of quality teacher training will require the establishment of expertise in the teaching of reading at every level of the education system. This includes in the classroom, with early grade teachers undertaking and applying pre-service training in reading instruction; in schools, by developing a network of master teachers or teacher peer support groups; and within the Ministry of Education, by ensuring competent support through teacher professional development and supervision structures. The teaching of reading must be integral to pre-service training and backed up through continuous professional development throughout a teacher's career. Without these institutional supports, the training and support provided by NGOs and others will be insufficient to deliver sustainable improvements, and low capacity will remain a barrier to success.

Finally, training is just one part of a complicated picture of why reading is not taught effectively. Save the Children's experiences in literacy programming demonstrated that teacher training designs must be cognisant of the wider context in which they are delivered. Contextual issues which can negatively affect implementation include poor motivation among teachers, beliefs that some children cannot learn, frequent movement of teachers between schools, language barriers, textbook-driven content, and absence of competency-based standards for reading, among others. The process of teacher training design should identify such issues and put in place measures to mitigate their impact. For example, in India, Save the Children is exploring the value of adding a teacher motivation package to the core Literacy Boost approach, in partnership with World Vision. Save the Children teams in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Uganda are also investigating this possibility.



## TRAINING TEACHERS TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S LITERACY IN SRI LANKA

In late 2012, as part of USAID's All Children Reading Grand Challenge, Save the Children adapted Literacy Boost for children with learning challenges in Sri Lanka. The key innovation was the introduction of the Special Needs Action Pack (SNAP), a set of simple tools to help teachers adapt teaching strategies to the individual needs of children who are struggling in the classroom. The SNAP tools aimed to address the fact that children with hidden disabilities and those struggling in the classroom are typically labeled 'slow learners' (or 'less competency achievers', LCAs) by their teachers and not sufficiently supported to reach their potential. Teachers were supplied with the SNAP tools and targeted training on their use, in addition to the standard Literacy Boost package of in-school and community-based activities. Children in the 15 target schools were also screened for hearing and vision impairments, and provided with glasses and/or hearing aids where necessary.

The 2014 endline results indicated that the project significantly improved students' reading fluency, especially for students identified by their teachers as LCAs at baseline. LCAs reported that they were able to participate equally or more so than their peers in most Literacy Boost community activities. The programme also helped students who were identified as having language and learning challenges catch up to their non-LCA learner peers in almost every reading skill. Finally, the endline incorporated a teacher survey, which indicated that the project helped teachers better utilise formative assessment and to use songs and games to develop students' phonologic skills.

A lesson learned, however, from the first phase of implementation is that projects aiming to reach the most deprived children should factor in discretionary funds to meet individual children's additional needs identified during the project (i.e. health support or counselling).

The project was well-received by the local government and communities, and the Minuwangoda Zonal Education Office has indicated their intention to scale up activities to all 149 schools in the zone.

Literacy SNAP has also been replicated since 2013 in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, an area recovering from civil war and with significantly poorer human development indicators than other parts of the country. The project was implemented amid continuing post-war rehabilitation and resettlement activities, as well as severe drought and localised flooding which affected the area during 2013-2014. These challenges caused considerable disruption to the education system, contributing to already high drop-out rates, irregular attendance and low attainment compared to the rest of the country. In addition to the contextual challenges, many teachers lacked the necessary skills to teach reading, including knowledge of child-centred learning, the five component reading skills, and how to support struggling pupils. This was of particular concern given the high percentage of

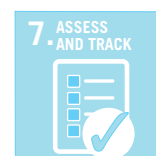
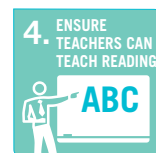
children reported by their teachers as having learning difficulties. In one school, teachers estimated that 50 per cent of the students were leaving primary grades without reaching expected levels of achievement and with little or no reading skills.

Despite these challenges and the wider contextual risks, the project has reached over 8,000 children, 375 teachers and 35 government officials. The project will be ending in 2016 after 3.5 years, and a proposal has been submitted for follow-on funding to expand SNAP even further across Sri Lanka. Phase II funding will also incorporate a focus on psychosocial support, to address the fact that many adults and children in the impact area are still coping with significant stress from the war.



Photo: Egon Hwan/Save the Children

Students in a classroom in the Mahajana School, the biggest and most successful school in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Ensure pre- and in-service teacher training includes specific instruction in the five component reading skills, and supports teachers to use formative assessment for the purposes of lesson planning.
- Invest in research to develop simple methods of delivering training on the five component reading skills to teachers on a large scale, achieving maximum impact with minimum time and at the lowest possible cost.
- Develop realistic and competency-based curricula, standards, and textbooks and ensure teachers are prepared to use them effectively.
- Ensure in-service training for teachers is regular, practical, local, and complemented by opportunities for mentoring and/or peer support.
- Embed staff with specific expertise in reading throughout the education system to ensure teachers are supported to teach reading effectively.



Photo: Asad Zaidi

Khaliq is an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)-trained teacher at a government primary school in Pakistan. For the past 27 years, Khaliq has been a committed teacher, struggling to engage children in their studies. “After the literacy boost training, I have learned how to engage children in class with the use of joyful learning methods. Save the Children provides us drawing books and colouring material, which helps us to improve children’s learning skills.”



Save the Children trained Linel Borgelin, a sixth-grade teacher, how to make learning more interactive. He teaches at Ecole Splendeur Mixte, a primary school supported by Save the Children in Carrefour, a neighbourhood near Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

# PRINCIPLE 5: LANGUAGE MATTERS

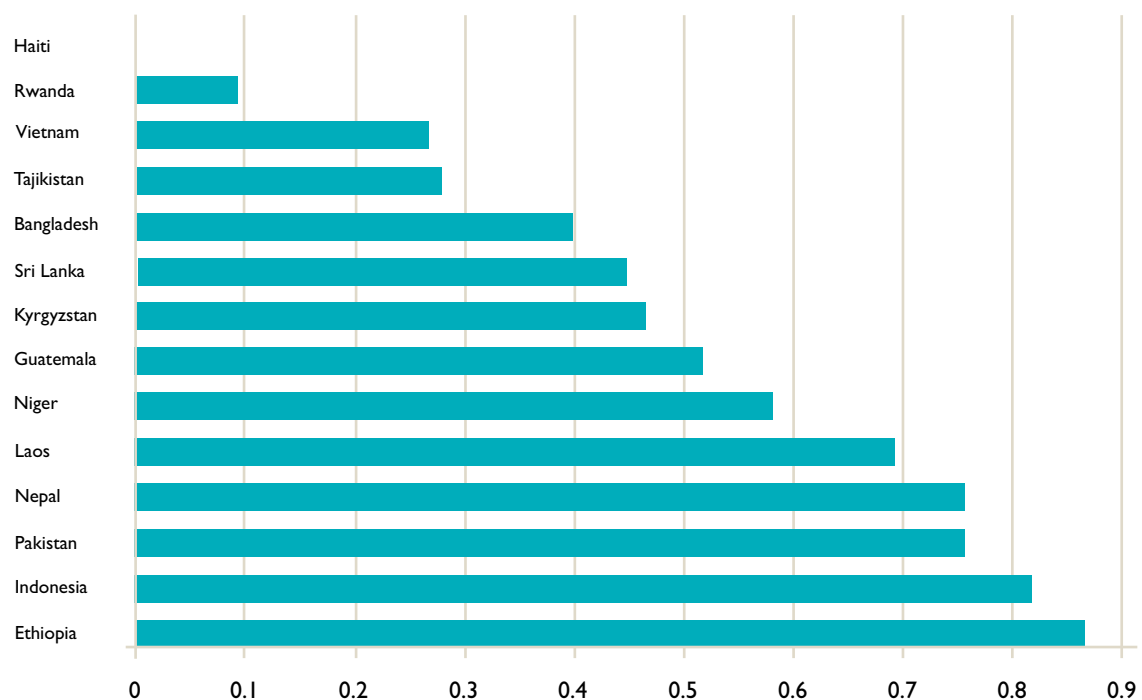


***Reading and writing activities for children – both in and out-of-school – should be conducted in a language that children understand.***

Every child has a right to learn in a language that they understand.<sup>84</sup> Save the Children implements literacy projects in many countries where linguistic diversity is commonplace, however language-in-education policies and practices differ both across and within education systems.<sup>85</sup>

Figure 14 measures linguistic diversity in some of the countries where Save the Children has literacy programming, showing the number of languages spoken in the country and Greenberg's diversity index, which scores countries on the probability that two citizens will share a mother tongue.

**FIGURE 11 GREENBERG DIVERSITY INDEX**



This is the probability that any two people of the country, selected at random, would have different mother tongues (Liebersson, 1981). The highest possible value, 1, indicates total diversity (that is, no two people have the same mother tongue) while the lowest possible value, 0, indicates no diversity at all (that is, everyone has the same mother tongue).<sup>86</sup>

As Figure 11 shows, Save the Children has implemented literacy projects in countries with very different linguistic profiles. For example, in Ethiopia, there are 86 living languages, while Indonesia has approximately 700. In contrast, Haiti has very little to no linguistic diversity, as most Haitians speak Creole as their first language. Despite the wide range in linguistic diversity among these three countries, each country has chosen to implement a similar language-in-education policy: transitional bilingual education, in which children in the early grades learn in a mother tongue, with transition to a single language of instruction (English, Indonesian, and French, respectively) in the upper grades.

Language matters for literacy because reading and writing acquisition is based on oral language. Thus, children tend to learn to read best in a language they speak and understand (referred to as L1, or mother tongue (MT) going forward).<sup>xiv</sup> Both international research and Save the Children monitoring, evaluation and learning results show that children learning to read in an unfamiliar language tend to perform more poorly on reading assessments than their peers who speak the language of instruction at home (see Figure 12).<sup>87</sup>



Photo: Susan Warner/Save the Children

**Third-grade teacher, Meseret Zerihun, in her classroom at the Sengota Primary School in Ginchi, Ethiopia. Save the Children trained Meseret how to teach core reading skills as part of Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme.**

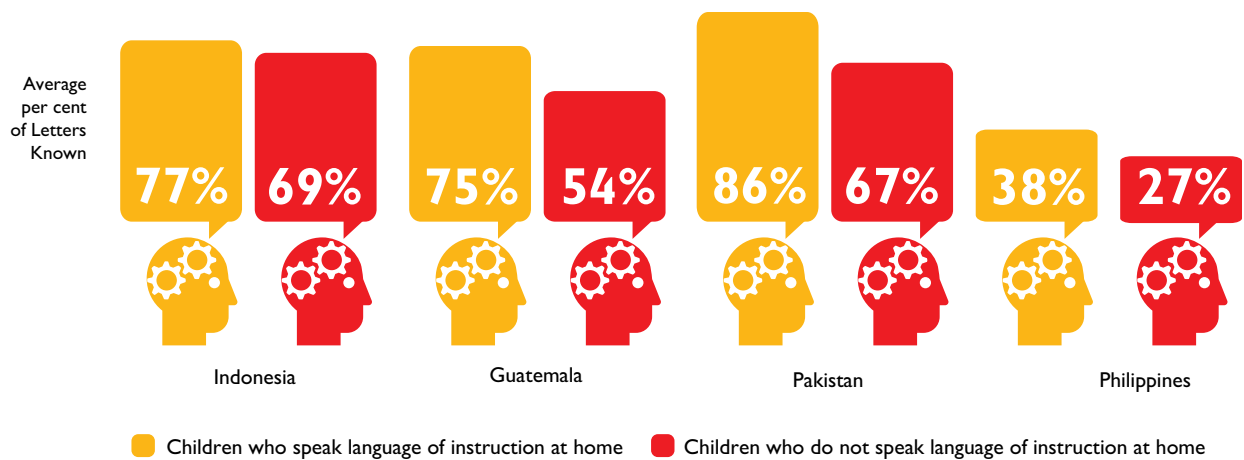
<sup>xiv</sup> Children may have more than one first language (L1) or mother tongue (MT), particularly in the linguistically diverse contexts in which Save the Children works. However, for the purposes of this document, we will use the terms L1 and L2, or MT or language of instruction (LOI) to illustrate the balance between languages in literacy programming.

Possessing adequate language comprehension and decoding skills in the L1 is essential for learning to read in that language.<sup>88</sup> A strong foundation in these L1 literacy skills also allows children to transfer their language and literacy abilities to learning in a second language, a common necessity in many countries where Save the Children works.<sup>89</sup> Children who first learn to read in their mother tongue are better prepared to learn in a second language, as first language literacy lays a cognitive and linguistic foundation for second language acquisition.<sup>90</sup>

## ADAPTING LITERACY INTERVENTIONS TO MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

Based on the understanding that language matters, Save the Children developed several resources to address language issues around learning. The Literacy Boost programme model includes concrete guidance to adapt Literacy Boost to specific linguistic contexts. The Literacy Boost Toolkit includes information on how to conduct a situational analysis of the linguistic context, provides a decision tree (see Figure 13) to select which language(s) to use to conduct literacy assessments, purchase/create books, and run camps, and includes a full-day teacher training module on how to address language issues in the literacy classroom. Save the Children has also produced *Teaching for a multilingual world: a guide for signature language programmes*, which aims to provide all education programmes with practical solutions to address language issues to improve children’s learning outcomes, even if capacity or funds are limited.<sup>91</sup>

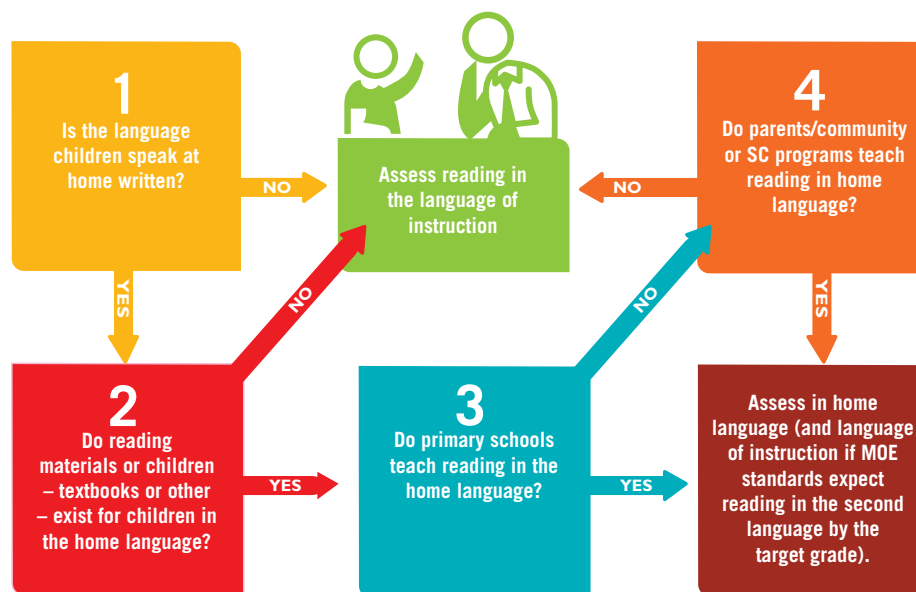
**FIGURE 12** PERCENT OF ALPHABET KNOWN AT BASELINE, MULTIPLE LITERACY BOOST PROJECT SITES



Children in Grades 2 and 3 in these Literacy Boost programme sites who do not speak the language of instruction at home lag behind their peers in recognising the alphabet of the language of instruction.<sup>92</sup>



FIGURE 13 LANGUAGE DECISION TREE FOR ASSESSMENTS



Many Save the Children literacy programmes during the 2012-2015 period used various strategies singly or in combination, including teacher training and instructional practices in the classroom; materials development; and community-based programming. In the classroom, some of Save the Children's literacy projects agreed with government to implement a local MT language as the language of instruction (LOI), particularly in the early grades; other projects were not allowed to; still others supplemented LOI in a second language with paraprofessional bilingual teachers. Book bank materials were often bilingual, based on local context, market demand, and the presence of adult readers.

To best respond to local-language policies, teacher linguistic capacity, and the availability of materials and readers in MT, Save the Children's literacy projects used varied strategies to implement mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE). However, the Literacy Boost model does not offer a comprehensive, systematic approach to teaching literacy in multilingual environments, nor are Literacy Boost trainers specialised in providing targeted technical assistance in this area.

While many of Save the Children's literacy projects grappled with the most effective way to foster literacy acquisition and development in young children learning in multilingual environments, projects in Indonesia, Haiti, Nepal and Vietnam provide interesting examples of teacher training and instructional practices used.

Across four projects in these countries, none articulated a singular, systematic approach to instruction. Rather, Save the Children staff decentralised decision-making related to appropriate MTB-MLE approaches. Teachers and programmes used various instructional strategies, ranging from teacher training, to the use of MT volunteers, to simply

teaching in the MT with no specific link to the eventual transition to a second language.

For example, in Indonesia, teachers in different schools were faced with very different linguistic contexts and student needs. In one school, all teachers and children spoke the same mother tongue language, and teachers used that language consistently in the first years of school. They took care to explicitly point out language differences, by saying things like 'In Bahasa Tetun you say it like this' and then 'In Bahasa Indonesia, you say it like this' to prepare children for the eventual transition to Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction.<sup>93</sup> In another school, teachers needed to instruct student populations that spoke multiple mother tongue languages, and created pictorial dictionaries with the help of their students and some parents, to help students bridge the gap between their mother tongue and the language of instruction.<sup>94</sup>

Promoting literacy development in mother tongue was also a focus of Save the Children's literacy programming outside of school in Indonesia. At community-based reading camps, facilitators reported singing songs in both languages and teaching children to identify shared linguistic components in their mother tongue and Bahasa Indonesia. They also took care to pair children with children who spoke with the same mother tongue for the Reading Buddies programme.<sup>95</sup>

In Vietnam, Save the Children implemented the use of classroom-based MT support for linguistic minorities. The project targeted multiple MT languages but teachers mainly came from the Kinh or Vietnamese-speaking population and did not speak their students' languages. As a result, Save the Children created a project that recruited mother-tongue speaking community members to serve as volunteer teacher assistants in early grade classrooms. Kinh-speaking teachers collaborated with these volunteers to plan

and carry out literacy lessons. To complement this initiative, Save the Children worked with the Ministry of Education to provide training for teachers and teaching assistants to adjust content in textbooks to reflect the local culture. We also supported teachers, parents and students to develop picture and story books based on

their local festivals, traditions, songs, etc. Additionally, Save the Children worked with the Ministry of Education to develop and provide training modules for pre-service teachers on teaching Vietnamese as a second language.



## ADDRESSING LANGUAGE AND LITERACY WITH REFUGEES IN THAILAND

In Thailand, Save the Children is working to provide basic educational activities for migrant children fleeing with their families from Myanmar to neighbouring countries. Many of these children are from a stateless ethnic minority from Myanmar's Rakhine state. These migrants arrive in Thailand, where they are typically detained in temporary shelters before being deported again or resettled in third countries. Migrants' access to social services, including educational provision, is poor.

Save the Children is working in the shelters to deliver reading-club style activities which support children's learning and promote a feeling of safety and emotional connection after recent traumatic experiences. Use of a case profile tool analysing education and child protection issues revealed a number of complexities around language of instruction and materials. Firstly, there was no widely used script for the community's language – the children's mother tongue. Secondly, the closest language, Bengali, was found to be different enough that the children would struggle to use it.

Therefore, it was necessary to produce reading materials using a new writing system, which was developed using an adapted version of the Latin script. The system has been approved by SIL International as a 95 per cent accurate representation of the oral ethnic language, and the choice of script was selected based on ease of learning and to prepare children for potential relocation to countries such as Malaysia and the United States.

The project developed a range of flashcards and teaching tools in local-language, and aims in the future to develop storybooks and a reading diagnostic tool. It has taken a flexible approach to language during implementation, recognising use of a range of languages across the migrant population, and some knowledge of English, Bengali and Burmese, particularly among older children and adults.



**Mu Ku, age 13, is a fourth-grade student at the Rocky Mountain Learning Centre and is a migrant from Myanmar. After her home in Mae Sot was completely inundated with flood water, she and her siblings sought shelter at a boarding home in the Rocky Mountain Learning Centre in Thailand. About 550 children, including Mu Ku, received two sets of school uniforms each. She is very thankful to receive new school uniforms.**

Language proved an ongoing challenge during implementation, with few literate local-language – speaking adults, and understandably limited reading materials available. As a result, the project has been fairly labour-intensive, with Save the Children directly delivering reading activities supported by translators, and developing and producing all reading materials. The focus has also been on gradually engaging parents and adults in the process of supporting language development, teaching them the new script, involving them in the production of materials and in activities to support children's reading and oral language. This is a slow process, but Save the Children believes that promoting mother tongue in this context will not only support children's learning, but also promote a sense of familiarity, connection, and cultural self-esteem.



## RESULTS FROM ADAPTING LITERACY INTERVENTIONS TO MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

Save the Children's efforts to adapt literacy interventions to multilingual contexts have identified several key considerations in teaching children to read. At the same time, an analysis of the project outcomes reveals important gaps in Save the Children's programming in multilingual contexts and implications for improved reading outcomes.

When children learn to read in their L1, or with specific instructional support to bridge their L1 knowledge to learn to read in the language of instruction, we expect to see the learning gaps between those two groups narrow. However, an examination of learning results from Nepal and Haiti reveals a more complicated picture.

In Nepal, the Save the Children project provided reading instruction in Awadhi (a minority, mother tongue language) in some schools where most children spoke Awadhi. It used Nepali (the typical language of instruction) in other schools where less than 50 per cent of children spoke Awadhi, as well as other languages. After two years of implementation, Save the Children assessed a sample of 159 Grade 2 students on letter knowledge, reading fluency, and comprehension. In all three skill areas, those children who were learning in Awadhi performed lower on average than those children learning in Nepali.<sup>96</sup> Further, Save the Children assessed Awadhi-speaking children using reading comprehension passages in both Awadhi and Nepali. The results showed that students in Awadhi medium schools did not perform significantly higher on reading Awadhi than reading Nepali; their performance was poor in both languages.<sup>97</sup>

Based on these results, one might conclude that teaching this sample of Nepali children to read in their mother tongue was a failure. The poor average

performance of those learning exclusively in their mother tongue becomes even more notable when one understands that only 57 per cent of those children learning in Nepali were native Nepali speakers.<sup>98</sup> However, it is essential to consider the following factors that likely contributed to different learning outcomes by language group:

- Teachers in Awadhi medium schools reported that they themselves had learned to read in Nepali only and thus felt that teaching reading in Awadhi was more difficult than teaching in Nepali.
- Teachers also suggested that Awadhi was a more phonologically-complex language than Nepali, further complicating the teaching-learning process in that language.
- Teachers reported that the Awadhi medium textbooks contained typographical errors and a lack of illustrations. Also, no supplementary reading materials in Awadhi were available.
- The reading fluency/comprehension passage in Awadhi was more difficult than that in Nepali. While the two passages were nearly equal in the total number of words, the Awadhi passage contained longer words and sentences.

In addition to these challenges, teachers in Nepal reported that parents initially resisted instruction in mother tongue. Research has long indicated that local attitudes toward language shapes language practices.<sup>99, 100</sup> Teachers, parents, and students may not support mother tongue instruction because the local-language is stigmatised. They may also not support MT instruction if they believe that it results in denying their children access to a language of power that is used in government and business. However, Save the Children's work engaging with communities around the issue of language has produced positive changes in attitude, as seen in the Haiti case study.



Photo: KJ Borja

5 year old preschool student, Sak Sokheng, is the head of the class and wants to be a teacher someday. Save the Children works with Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) to improve the accessibility and quality of basic education for children, particularly from disadvantaged groups.



## ADDRESSING CULTURAL ATTITUDES AROUND MOTHER TONGUE INSTRUCTION IN HAITI

In Haiti, almost every child's mother tongue is Haitian Creole, which is also the national language. It has a shallow orthography, meaning the correspondence between spelling and sounds is very high, making it, theoretically, a relatively easy language to learn to read. As a result, Save the Children had expectations of children's quick success in reading and an increase in learning outcomes when designing the *Lekti se Lavni* (Reading is the Future) project.

However, in the first two years of implementation, the results were disappointing and there was very little improvement in children's reading scores. The team conducted a review, with unsettling results. Schools were not implementing the project, except when Save the Children staff were present. Further investigation revealed that the underlying cause of this problem was parents' negative perceptions of mother tongue instruction.

In Haiti, French is seen as a pathway out of poverty – an international language associated with high social status. Conversely, parents in a focus group discussion described Creole as 'a shame' for them. So, while schools (mostly private, as the education system in Haiti is about 75-80 per cent private schools) were open to working with Save the Children, they were not willing or able to defy the demands of fee-paying parents who wanted their children to learn in French.

These discoveries prompted a completely new approach in the third year of the project. First, Save the Children partnered with the Ministry of Education to conduct a series of public discussions with parents about the importance of learning to read first in Creole. Second, Save the Children committed to work only with those school directors who expressed genuine interest in the *Lekti se Lavni* model and were willing to sign a partnership agreement promising to support the initiative at their school.

At the end of the third year, when the assessment results were analysed, the benefits of this approach were clear. For the first time in three years, there was evidence of clear improvement in children's reading scores in both French and Creole. In a focus group with parents at the end of the year, their appreciation of the project's impact and support were also evident. As one parent noted, 'we used to have to teach our children to read at home; now we are confident that when we send them to school they will learn.'



Photo: Save the Children

Children fill a classroom at the Institution Mixte Splendeur in Carrefour, Haiti. Save the Children helped rebuild and equip the school and train its teachers – one of the many ways Save the Children worked to restore hope and strengthen services for children years after the epic earthquake.

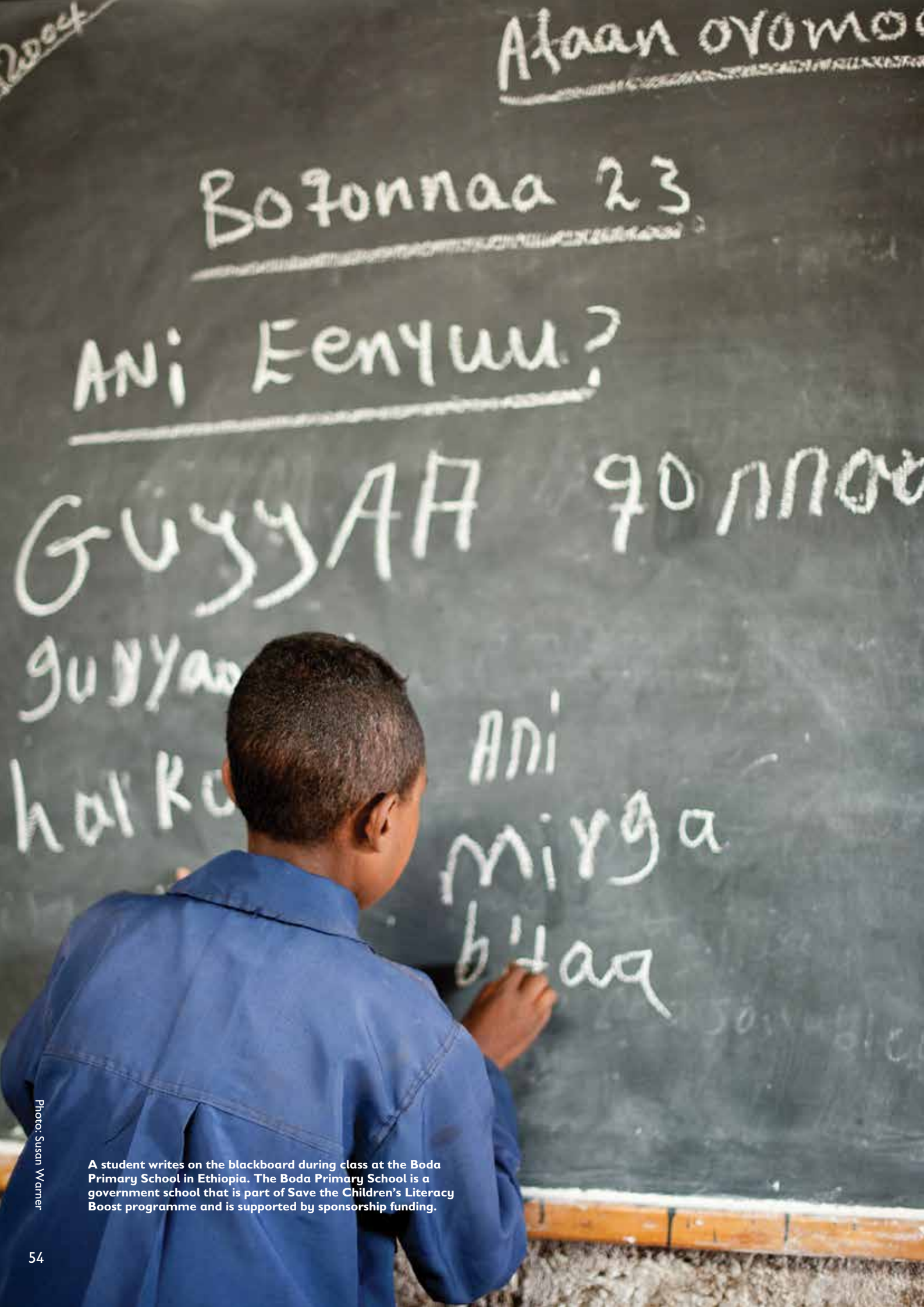


## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Governments, NGOs and donors should conduct robust linguistic situational analyses, including reviews of language-in-education policies and mapping of language groups, of all areas and countries where they work. They must also collect robust and nuanced data on language, to better understand its role in shaping the way children learn to read.
- Collaboration with education officials is needed to adapt literacy programming to apply the most effective Mother Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTBMLE) model within the constraints of local policy.
- Education systems must ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach in mother tongue languages, including through teacher recruitment, deployment, and pre- and in-service training.
- Governments should design and implement comprehensive behaviour change and communication programmes to address attitudes to minority languages that could negatively impact literacy learning in multilingual contexts.
- Governments should develop language policies that are based on a clear understanding of language and literacy learning and are driven by pedagogy, as well as work with NGOs, UN agencies and other governments to continue the discussion around appropriate language policy.



Udiman and his friends Yubaraj and Uttam all participate in a reading camp in Nepal.



2004

Alaan ovomoo

Bo7onnaa 23

ANI: Eenyuu?

GUYAA 90

guyaa

haiko

ANI  
miyga  
b'aaq

Photo: Susan Warner

A student writes on the blackboard during class at the Boda Primary School in Ethiopia. The Boda Primary School is a government school that is part of Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme and is supported by sponsorship funding.

# PRINCIPLE 6: PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE



**Children need ample opportunities to practise their literacy skills, both inside and outside of school.**

Children gain confidence through repeated, enjoyable opportunities to practise reading and writing – at home, in the community, and in school – and by using these skills in their daily life. It is widely proven that reading volume, or the amount of time a child engages in reading, is positively related to reading outcomes.<sup>101, 102</sup> Save the Children’s 2015 12-site study of Literacy Boost replicated this important finding in a range of developing contexts – from urban Indonesia to rural Ethiopia – demonstrating that children who participate in more out-of-school reading activities have higher reading scores.<sup>103</sup> While there is more to learn about this relationship, academic studies conclude that: ‘...the research currently available includes experimental evidence for a causal role for reading volume in fostering improved reading proficiency.’<sup>104</sup>

Though the links between opportunities to read and reading outcomes are clear, children have limited time for reading practice in many of the countries where Save the Children works. In fact, research has shown that students in many countries only have 2.5 hours a day of ‘on-task’ time, where the student and teacher are present and focused on learning, for six months out of the year.<sup>105</sup> This equals approximately 300 hours of time for school-based learning each year, with reading instruction and practice representing a

very small portion of these hours. Given that this in-school time is a small fraction (about 11 per cent) of a child’s waking hours, it is imperative that children have opportunities to practise reading skills in the home and community, as well as in school.<sup>106</sup>

## SUPPORTING READING PRACTICE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE COMMUNITY

The beauty of reading practice is that it can take place almost anywhere – in classrooms and schools, as well as in homes and communities. Reading practice can happen in markets and hospitals, shops and clinics. Practice can take the form of reading with a buddy, attending a reading camp or club, or borrowing books to read at home.<sup>xv</sup>

Save the Children has observed and begun to address several barriers that hinder children’s reading practice in school: a lack of time in the school day, limited availability of children’s reading materials, and teachers who are not equipped to support students’ practice. We have worked with governments to encourage and strengthen reading practice in the classroom, by increasing the quality of and time allocated to reading, as well as the availability of reading materials. In eight countries, Save the Children staff are actively advocating for the national ministries of education to incorporate more time for reading practice in the curriculum and within the school day itself.<sup>xvi</sup> In Nepal, the government has increased the daily instructional time, including reading instruction, by 33 per cent and has introduced a workbook to support children’s reading practice each day. In Somalia, Save the Children advocated and supported the Ministry of Education to include a reading period in the daily school schedule, where children practise oral and silent reading as well as participate in guided storytelling with

<sup>xv</sup> For more information on community-based reading activities, see Principle 4: Engage Parents and Communities.

<sup>xvi</sup> Countries include: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia.

Although the Literacy Boost model trains teachers to include read-alouds and time for children's reading practice in daily lessons, many teachers struggle to actively support reading practice. Teachers have shared that they feel bound to make progress through the national textbook and curriculum, and many teachers never experienced reading practice in their own education.

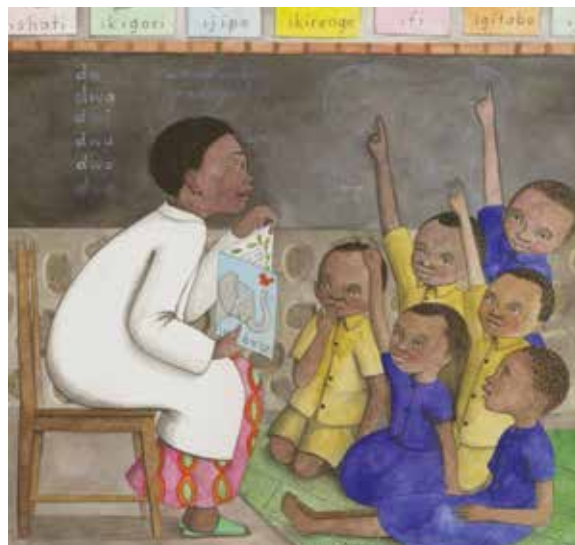
A third grade teacher from the West Showa region of Ethiopia commented:

'Before the introduction of Literacy Boost programme in our school by Save the Children, we had been all blind of our students' literacy problems. We'd just been going to class; written [sic] on blackboard, read from textbook, let some students read from textbook and blackboard. We had been receiving comments from parents on why their children at their grade level could not identify all letters and read words in their text correctly. We had been implementing teaching strategies that do not support students' reading skills development. There had been no cooperative learning habit among our students.'<sup>107</sup>

As a result, Save the Children is working from the community to national level to increase parents' and teachers' understanding of why reading practice is important, as well as facilitating behaviour change around how to read to children and with children.

At the community level, Save the Children promotes a range of activities to increase opportunities to practise reading. For instance, in Peru, parents are encouraged to create 'Reading Corners' in their homes to give their children a place to practise reading and work on homework. These corners allow children the space and freedom to read independently, while elevating the practice of reading by giving it a physical space in the home, which is typically a common, shared space for the entire family.

In the United Kingdom, the Families Connect project brings parents together at schools to learn and practise new reading activities. Parents meet regularly to learn a new skill, practise it together, and try it with their children. At the close of the project's first year, more than 90 per cent of parents surveyed reported that they felt more able to make decisions about their children's learning, as well as able to provide active support after the project.<sup>108</sup>



Source: Nhan-O'Reilly, J. (2014). *Enjoying books together: a guide for teachers on the use of books in the classroom*. Save the Children. Illustrated by Sophie Blackhall.

In Rwanda, Save the Children's Rwandan Children's Book Initiative developed a customised teacher training curriculum and a supplementary teachers' guide on "Enjoying Books Together: a guide for teacher on the use of books in the classroom," in both Kinyarwanda and English. The guide provides step-by-step, illustrated guidance for teachers on implementing read-alouds, facilitating students' independent reading, and managing and caring for book collections, and was shared with the Rwandan Education Board, district education offices, principals and teachers as a supplement to the teacher training and classroom book collections.<sup>109</sup>



Photo: CI Clarke/Save the Children

Fugi, age 10, with her friends in school in Indonesia. After experiencing domestic abuse, Fugi and her brother were sent to live in an orphanage. Fortunately, she is now able to live with her mother again and the orphanage provides the support for her to continue her education.





## ENGAGING FAMILIES IN READING PRACTICE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the UK, the Families Connect project responds to a recognised correlation between home learning environment and learning outcomes. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study found<sup>110</sup> that across the country, children from homes that scored in the lowest 20 per cent on the Home Learning Environment spectrum were almost three times less likely to attain Level 5 (standard level for age 13) than children from homes in the top 20 per cent. In many schools, children from low-income, low-education backgrounds fall behind due to a lack of appropriate home support for their learning. While in the vast majority of cases, parents are keen to see their children succeed, they often lack the skills or confidence to support them to practise reading outside of school.

Families Connect is a new project investigating how to support children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their potential. It aims to unite parents, schools and communities in support of its goals. The core activity is a training package, acquainting parents with a range of literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development activities, which can be used to support learning at home. At each session, parents have a chance to learn and discuss techniques and practise them with their children, before feeding back to the group. Parents are provided with materials and worksheets to use at home.

To date, Families Connect has been piloted in ten schools, in a variety of locations across the United Kingdom. Results from the pilot evaluation are currently being analysed, with a view to improving programme design and replicating effective elements on a larger scale. As a model, Families Connect is still in its infancy and will continue to be developed in the coming years.

Initial feedback from the project has been positive. After taking part, 90 per cent of parents reported an increased ability to make choices about their children's learning in the home, and 82 per cent reported an improved relationship with their children. Schools reported increased understanding of parents' needs, and a better relationship between parents and teachers, as well as increased literacy and motivation among pupils. High levels of retention indicated the project's popularity with parents.

Replication potential was a key factor in the design of the project. The techniques taught as part of Families Connect are not linked to a specific curriculum, and could potentially be replicated with parents at any school. In future the Families Connect model could be used to train community professionals, such as social workers or foster caregivers, to support children's learning outside of school.



Photo: Neil Harrison

Julie guides her son Harley, age 4, through an activity at a Families Connect session at a school in Belfast, UK.



## USING MOBILE TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN BANGLADESH

Rapidly increasing access to mobile technology worldwide is creating new opportunities to support reading at home. While Bangladesh has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world, it is ahead of many others in terms of mobile access.<sup>111, 112</sup> The pioneering *Grameenphone* (Village Phone) project in Bangladesh, which began in the 1990s to empower rural women through mobile services, has significantly increased the use of mobile technology. In 2014, more than 50 per cent of the national population were mobile subscribers.<sup>113</sup>

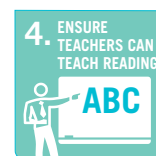
Since 2014, Save the Children has used mobile technology through the mBoost project to remind and motivate parents and caregivers to support their children's reading practice and to create an enabling home learning environment in Bangladesh.

Designed to complement Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme, the mBoost project sends regular text and voice messages to parents' and teachers' mobile phones, to encourage behaviours that support children's reading skills. Parents receive mobile messages to remind them of the topic and practices covered in monthly parental awareness workshops they have attended. Most often, the messages contain simple reminders for parents to ask children about their day or question them about their reading, ensuring lessons from the workshops are put into practice.

Parents in the project noted that the messages helped them remember that they can make their homes enabling learning environments for their children through a few practical actions. They reported that the mBoost messages helped them to implement this knowledge within the home, with one parent saying, 'As I hear the recording from mobile device I can understand now what to do, as this is similar to what we hear in the monthly parental workshop. But my child's father does not have any idea what I learnt in the parental workshop. [However] mBoost supported a sharing culture.'

For teachers, the mobile messages relate to what they have learned in the most recent Literacy Boost teacher training sessions, and encourage teachers to practise easy activities in their classrooms that can bolster their students' literacy skills, like playing word games or telling stories. Teachers commented that the messages increased their ability to transform the Literacy Boost training into knowledge and action in their classrooms.

After seven months of mBoost intervention, Grade 1 students made strong gains in their reading skills. Through activities like mBoost, Save the Children is developing new and innovative methods to support teachers and parents as they encourage children's reading practice and skill development.



### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Education systems should identify creative means to incorporate more time for reading practice in the school day.
- Teachers and parents need to be supported to encourage reading practice in the classroom and home.
- In order to be successful reading practice activities should be adapted for the local cultural and community context.

Zahiidur, age 9, reads a book at his home in Pocchim Pukra, Bangladesh. He is in class 3 at a government school.



Photo: Abir Abdullah/Save the Children

# PRINCIPLE 7: ASSESS AND TRACK

***Formative and summative reading assessments should be conducted at regular intervals in order to tailor reading policies and programmes to the needs of individual learners, disadvantaged groups and students throughout the country.***

At the classroom level, regular formative assessments are essential to ensure that reading instruction is continuously adjusted to meet learners' needs. When properly used, these assessments ensure teachers have an in-depth understanding of their students' skills, and are able to tailor and differentiate lessons accordingly. Summative reading assessments help programme staff and ministry partners analyse reading data at a macro-level, and inform evidence-based decision-making to improve policy and programme implementation.

Currently, many education systems administer summative learning assessments at the end of the primary school cycle. This is often the first time a child's learning is assessed. Formative assessment is often nonexistent or does not produce actionable data for teachers or administrators. As a result, education systems lack concrete data and are not able to identify and respond to challenges at an early enough stage. Strong competency-based assessment processes enable education systems to identify problems and act on them at the classroom, school, regional and national levels.

Data is also a valuable advocacy tool when used by communities as a basis on which to demand better services, and to lobby government to respond to areas of poor performance. Results can also be used to reflect on which interventions have worked and why, to inform dialogue with partners and choices about scale-up and replication.

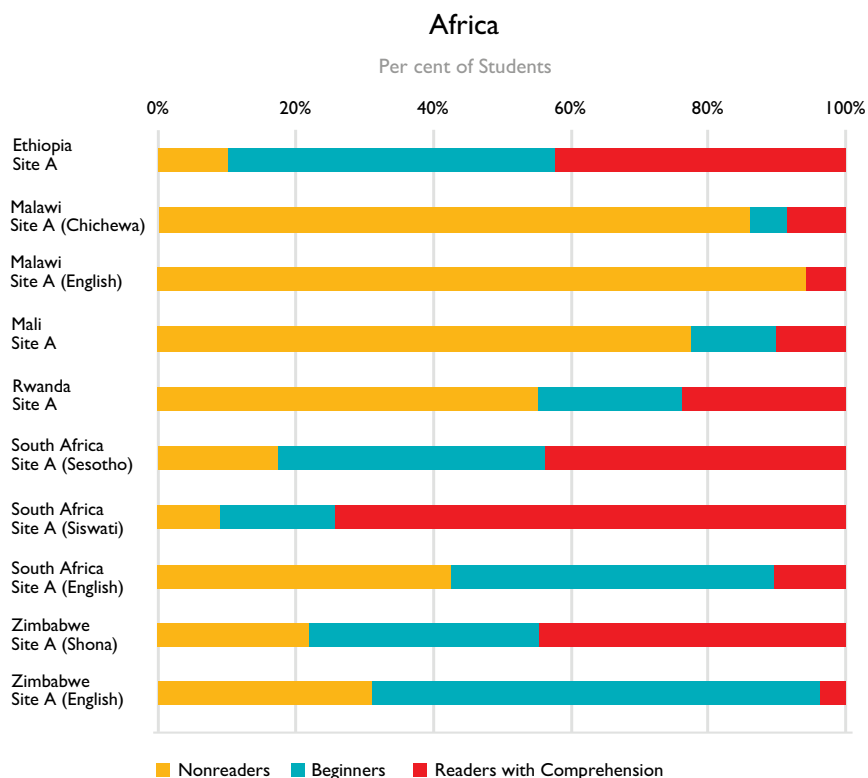
## SAVE THE CHILDREN'S EFFORTS TO ASSESS AND TRACK LITERACY OUTCOMES

During 2012-2015, Save the Children used a variety of tools to assess emergent literacy and core reading skills. Primary among these was the Literacy Boost assessment tool, which was used to conduct 52 baseline surveys and 44 midline or endline surveys during 2012-2015. The tool is similar in many ways to the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool developed by RTI International in partnership with USAID.<sup>114</sup> However, it tests a wider range of emergent reading skills and collects more detailed student background data, making it well suited to inform evidence-based programming.

In addition to the Literacy Boost tool, Save the Children's literacy projects used a variety of other assessment tools during 2012-2015, including the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), Early Grades Reading Assessment (EGRA), Uwezo assessment and government-developed or other assessment tools. Furthermore, Save the Children conducted 10 International Development and Learning Assessments (IDELA) in 2014 and 20 in 2015; a tool developed by Save the Children to provide programmes and ministries with ongoing data on the status of children ages 3.5 to 6. The collection of data from across a wide range of countries and contexts where children are struggling most to learn means that Save the Children is uniquely positioned to identify patterns and draw global conclusions, providing an evidence base for advocacy at an international level.

Data on reading with comprehension provides a view of progress as well as an idea of how much more work must be done to ensure that all children can read. The graphs on pages 61 and 62 highlight the reading with comprehension status of students from 16 of the projects after approximately one year or more of implementation during the 2012-2015 period.

**FIGURE 14** PER CENT OF STUDENTS WHO ARE NON-READERS, BEGINNERS, OR READERS WITH COMPREHENSION ACROSS 16 LITERACY PROJECT SITES THAT COLLECTED MIDLINE OR ENDLINE EVALUATION DATA IN 2012-2015.



Nonreaders are students who could not read a grade-level reading passage on their own. Beginners are those who could read the passage but could not answer at least 75-80 per cent of the comprehension questions about the passage (the threshold depended on the total number of literal comprehension questions asked). 'Readers with Comprehension' could read the grade-level passage on their own and correctly answer 75-80 per cent of the comprehension questions.<sup>115</sup>

The red portion of each graph represents the proportion of students in the site who are 'readers with comprehension'; that is, they were able to read a grade-level reading passage on their own and to correctly answer 75-80 per cent of the literal comprehension questions they were asked about the passage. The blue portion of each bar represents 'beginners', students who could read on their own

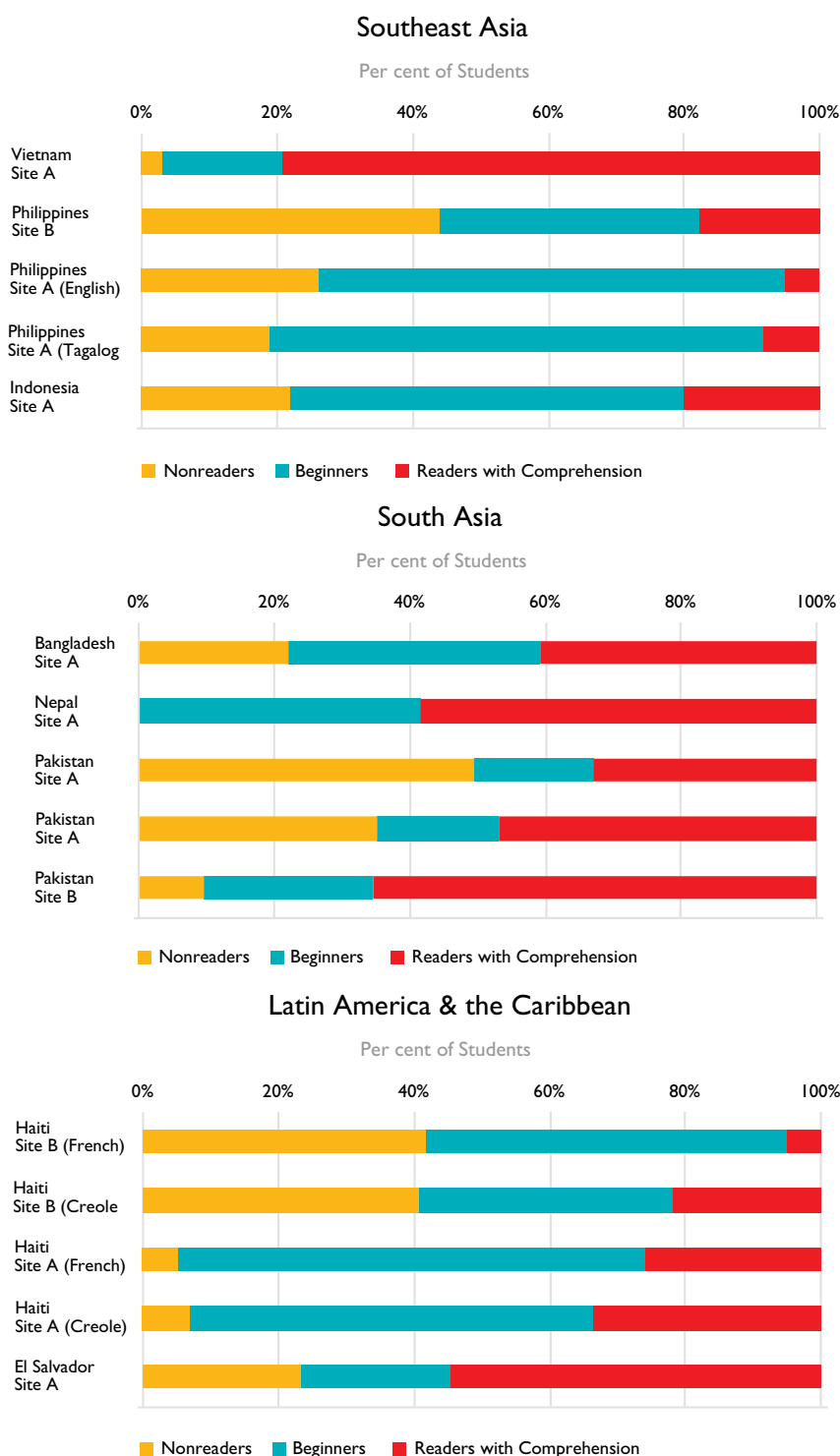
but could not answer at least 75-80 per cent of the literal comprehension questions correctly. The yellow portion represents non-readers. Because the reading assessment tools were adapted to fit each context, these graphs should not be used to make comparisons across sites, however they do enable a view of whether and how well children can demonstrate basic skills.



Photo: Susan Warner

**Arnaldo Boento, age 11, reads in his fourth-grade class in his school in Mozambique.**

**FIGURE 14** PER CENT OF STUDENTS WHO ARE NON-READERS, BEGINNERS, OR READERS WITH COMPREHENSION ACROSS 16 LITERACY PROJECT SITES THAT COLLECTED MIDLINE OR ENDLINE EVALUATION DATA IN 2012-2015.

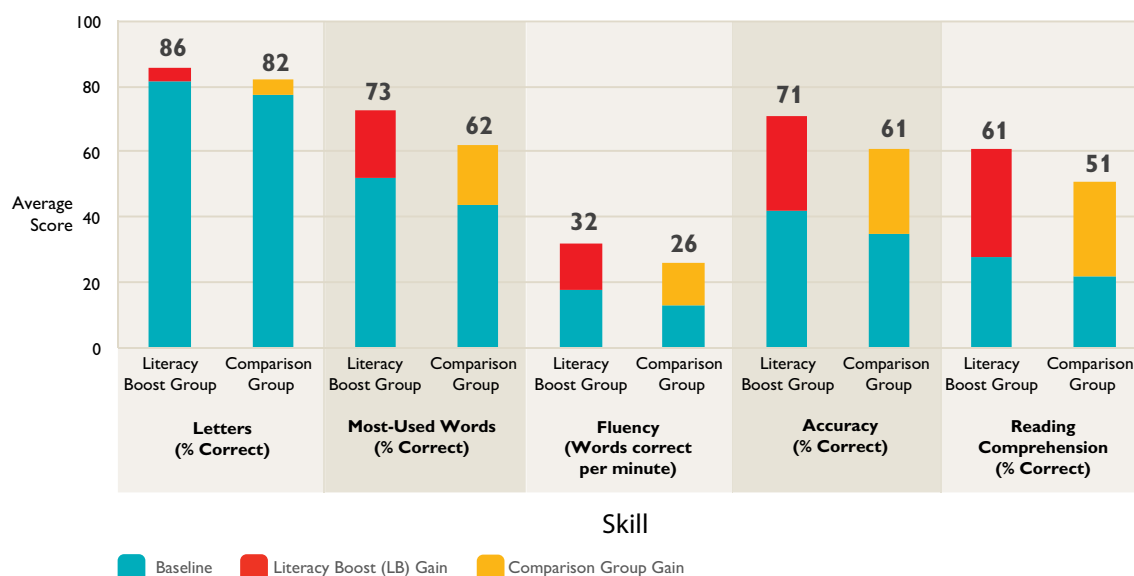


Nonreaders are students who could not read a grade-level reading passage on their own. Beginners are those who could read the passage but could not answer at least 75-80 per cent of the comprehension questions about the passage (the threshold depended on the total number of literal comprehension questions asked). 'Readers with Comprehension' could read the grade-level passage on their own and correctly answer 75-80 per cent of the comprehension questions.<sup>115</sup>

Data across the skills can be used to quantify impact and investigate equity. Figure 15 provides an example of the impact data we collected using the Literacy Boost tool. In each new Literacy Boost location, Save the Children aims to conduct experimental or quasi-experimental impact evaluations. That can be an

impact evaluation that randomly assigns schools to the intervention or control group, or an evaluation that matches comparison schools to intervention schools by key factors such as school type, language, average socio-economic status and urbanicity.

FIGURE 15 LITERACY BOOST IMPACT IN BANGLADESH

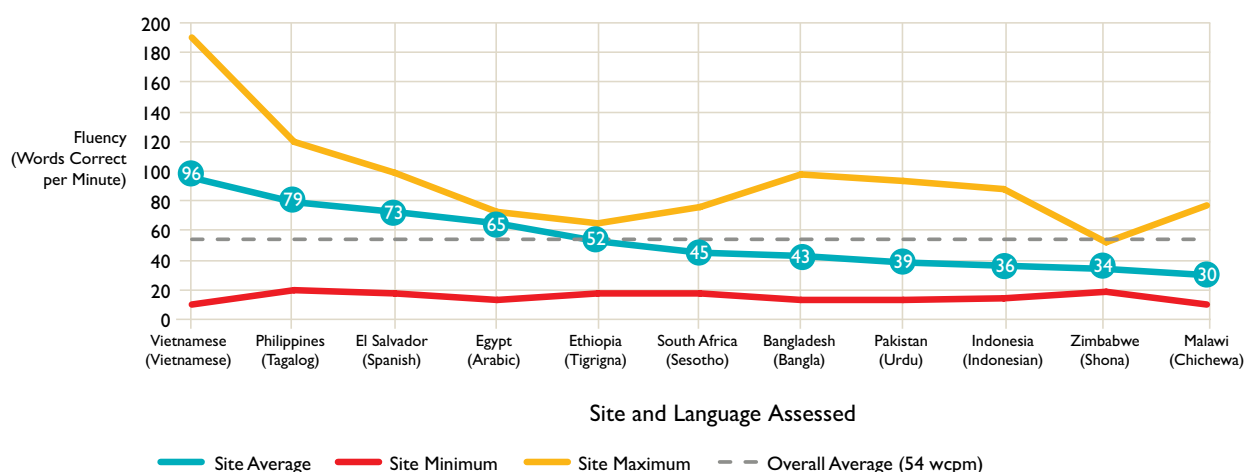


Results from a longitudinal evaluation of Literacy Boost in Bangladesh. Children were randomly sampled and assessed at the beginning of Grade 2 and then again after one year of Literacy Boost programme implementation. Data was collected using the Literacy Boost assessment tool.<sup>116</sup>

## LESSONS FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

Aside from leveraging this volume of data to improve programme implementation, the process of collecting it enabled us to identify some examples of best practice in relation to assessment and tracking.

- Focus on Comprehension:** Save the Children's Literacy Boost assessment tool measures multiple levels of children's reading comprehension, as opposed to focusing primarily on fluency or simple factual recall questions. This is important because fluency does not necessarily signal comprehension, and increasing only the speed at which children read is unlikely to improve their overall performance.<sup>117</sup> It is also difficult to use fluency as a proxy for comprehension because standard measurements do not include prosody, which is the component of fluency that relates most directly to comprehension and there is no common target that can be used across languages and locations. For example, in 11 Save the Children sites among readers whose comprehension scores were 80 per cent or greater, average children's oral reading fluency levels ranged from 30 to 96 words correct per minute (Figure 16).<sup>118</sup> Save the Children prefers to directly measure children's ability to make meaning of text to ensure they are improving their comprehension.
- Individual pupil tracking:** Save the Children has committed to tracking individual pupils for assessments as often as possible, instead of sampling cross-sections of children across schools or districts. This approach increases the precision of gain-score estimates and enables us to identify and respond to the challenges faced by specific target groups since we can identify the degree to which specific background characteristics, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and the home literacy environment, predict improvements in children's reading scores.
- Innovation and influence:** The Literacy Boost assessment approach was used by UNICEF to frame a new learning indicator in their Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).<sup>119</sup> In addition, its approach to assessing learning from age three to Grade 3 is documented by UNESCO in its forthcoming guide to oral assessment. In partnership with RTI International, Save the Children piloted the use of tablets in 19 countries to gather this data using Tangerine®, an open-source-software for programming early grade reading assessments. Save the Children's approach to gathering Inter Rater Reliability (IRR), that is, to continuously check on the extent to which ratings given by different assessors are similar throughout school-based data collection, was used by RTI International to improve their EGRA toolkit in 2015.
- Beyond a general treatment approach to reading interventions:** A key lesson learned from Save the Children's literacy work over the last several years is that a general treatment, or a 'one size fits all' approach to reading interventions does not guarantee that students who are falling behind at baseline will catch up with their peers. In 2013, an analysis of Literacy Boost projects across seven countries showed that children from traditionally

**FIGURE 16** ORAL READING FLUENCY RATES AMONG READERS WITH COMPREHENSION

Average, minimum, and maximum oral reading fluency rates among readers with comprehension in 11 project sites that collected data from 2012-2015. These are projects that collected data in 2013-2014 and where at least 50 of the students who were assessed could read with comprehension.<sup>120</sup>

disadvantaged groups – that is, girls, students from poor households, and students from less rich home literacy environments – generally did not benefit significantly more from the programme than their peers, with the exception of two sites in Malawi and Nepal, where poorer students did catch up.<sup>121</sup> More often than not, even when Literacy Boost significantly increased reading skills for all students in the treatment group, the inequities in reading achievement at baseline in most sites were still present at endline. These findings suggest that we need to go beyond a general treatment approach in order to close the gaps in learning achievement; we must develop strong processes for identifying disadvantaged children at baseline and tailor programmes to reach these struggling students. Additionally, moving forward, Save the Children will have a greater focus on understanding the differences among learners and the interventions that are necessary to reach each child.


Despite the progress described above, Save the Children acknowledges that challenges remain in effectively generating and using literacy data:

- **Monitoring:** Due to an initial focus on evaluation, Save the Children missed opportunities to gather valuable monitoring data early in the 2012-2015 period. This meant that we were unable to thoroughly investigate whether and how specific programme activities led to results, and which activities needed to be improved upon.
- **Data use:** Save the Children faced an ongoing challenge to ensure that the body of data gathered was used effectively to inform programme design. On many occasions, baseline data was not available on time to inform the programme design process. Available time and capacity of programme staff to use data effectively was also an issue, suggesting a need for greater investment in this area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Education systems need to support teachers to collect, analyse and use formative assessment data, putting in place practical approaches to assessment, which can be delivered within the time available.
- Literacy interventions should track comprehension, alongside other reading skills, as the most important indicator of literacy acquisition.
- Research questions should be defined at the start of each new intervention, with plans in place for how summative data will be used to inform programme design or as a basis for advocacy.
- NGOs and governments should take advantage of the increasing availability of education data and use it to inform policy and practice.





Rani, age 7, reading in her second-grade class in Pakistan. Rani lives in a small house with her parents and four brothers and sisters. Previously, Rani was a weak student who often avoided school because she lacked proper reading and writing skills. However, due to the Literacy Boost programme and increased support from her teachers, her skills have improved greatly and Rani now looks forward to her lessons.

# PRINCIPLE 8: POLICY



***Government policies and an enabling environment must exist to support and sustain teachers, communities and parents to enable children to learn to read.***

All children should be able to read with comprehension by the time they leave primary school. To make this happen, it is not enough to deliver pockets of effective programming here and there. Instead, governments, donors, NGOs and other partners, including the national media, libraries, civil society, the book publishing industry and others, in every country need to make investing in literacy a top priority. There must also be clear and coherent national policy frameworks and targets for children's early grade reading, as well as sufficient budgets and action plans to achieve those targets. National policy frameworks, or National Literacy Action Plans, can be used to ensure resources are available to deliver the key elements from all of the seven principles previously explored in this report.

## INFLUENCING GOVERNMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY TO CREATE A NATIONAL CULTURE OF READING

Save the Children has identified a number of instances around the globe where policy changes to prioritise literacy and create a culture of reading are becoming a reality. These examples signal the beginnings of systemic shifts toward good practice inside classrooms and out, as well as a movement towards greater sustainability.

In Bhutan, the Government's five-year development plan now includes Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), following a five-year collaboration with Save the Children and UNICEF. In Ethiopia, the Tigray Regional Education Bureau scaled up the Literacy Boost teacher training approach to all its primary school teachers after seeing results from the programme across the region and country. Similarly, in Mozambique the national teacher training institutes adopted the core principles of the Literacy Boost teacher training approach as part of the pre-service and in-service training for teachers, as well as ongoing supervision and monitoring. In Rwanda, at the request of the Government, Save the Children trained the Rwanda Education Board's national school inspectors on early literacy, focusing specifically on how inspectors should assess the quality of pre-primary education, primary literacy instruction and the creation of a print-rich literacy environment in classrooms.

Additionally, Save the Children observed other instances where literacy efforts achieved greater scale and results by working with other government ministries, civil society, and the private sector. Save the Children provided technical input on emergent literacy and the importance of books for very young children to the Ministry of Health in Rwanda, which will be incorporated into a revised training toolkit for Community Health Workers on Early Childhood Development. In Malawi and El Salvador, Save the Children made a concerted effort to partner with local media, such as radio stations and newspapers, to improve public awareness of the importance of reading, improve the quality of media reporting on the topic, and share stories and results from community reading activities. Through the Children's Book Initiative and First Read projects being implemented in Bhutan, Cambodia, Rwanda, and the Philippines, Save the Children worked directly with publishing industries to improve the quality, quantity, and availability of children's literature in the marketplace.

While these examples show positive steps towards developing a national literacy culture, better tools and platforms are needed to allow educators and literacy champions to connect and collaborate. To this end, Save the Children has devised the Literacy

Readiness to Scale tool, which aims to help literacy projects analyse national policy and partner context.



## RWANDA READS: PROMOTING A CULTURE OF READING FOR ALL CHILDREN

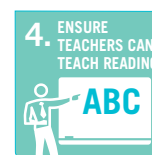
Rwanda Reads is a promising example of a multi-institutional, national platform for promoting a culture of reading throughout a country.

This four-year initiative was launched in 2012 by the Rwanda Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) through the Rwanda Education Board (REB) with the support of USAID and in cooperation with development partners, including Save the Children, other NGOs, and donor organisations. As a knowledge platform and coordinating body that brings a range of stakeholders together, Rwanda Reads works to ‘support, facilitate, and promote efforts to create literate citizens of Rwanda more capable of influencing their own individual achievement, economic growth, and better health – all of which will contribute to the overall development and prosperity of the country.’<sup>122</sup> This national model is exciting because it engages and builds the capacity of a wide range of government and civil society stakeholders, as well as addressing reading-related supply and demand issues.



Photo: J. William Hirtle/Save the Children

Third-grade students at Ruhanga Primary School showing their favourite books and participating in silent reading and group reading activities. Save the Children’s Education Programme in Rwanda combines teacher training, assessments, community action, innovative classroom designs, and support for the publishing of children’s books in order to increase literacy in Rwanda.



## ADDRESSING EQUITY IN LITERACY POLICIES

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework, through SDG 4 on quality education, makes improving children’s basic reading and writing skills a clear global priority. It also puts equity and inclusion front and centre, so as to narrow the education gaps between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children.<sup>123, 124</sup> This is critical to ensure every last child is able to read. For example, the Incheon Declaration – which is the global education community’s main political statement for our vision for the next 15 years – states, ‘...we commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all.’<sup>125</sup>

Governments, donors, and NGOs must explicitly consider the background context of equity and the equity impacts of their programmes and policies in order to understand the impact, whether positive or negative, on equity in learning. This background analysis should encompass a range of programme efforts, including: standards and curriculum – to ensure the curriculum is not just designed to meet the needs of the fastest learners; teacher policy, recruitment and deployment; teaching and learning materials; and language issues. Literacy programmes and policies should promote not just technical solutions, but take into account and explicitly target the most disadvantaged children. There is a need to be clear as to how the most deprived and excluded children will be supported to read with comprehension by the end of primary school, including ensuring sufficient data disaggregation and equity-based targets within national policy frameworks.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- All countries should develop and adopt National Literacy Action Plans to support children’s early grade reading and writing.<sup>1</sup> National Literacy Action Plans should be supported by dedicated, equitable and fair financing; and include targeted policies to remove any discrimination toward excluded groups. They should engage children, parents and communities and be accountable to them.
- Plans should include pre-primary and early grade reading and learning targets to ensure that all children learn to read with comprehension by the time they leave primary school, and set out how the children furthest behind will make progress to meet the targets in order to reduce equity gaps.
- Donors, NGOs and development agencies should ensure all their education interventions assess the impact on literacy acquisition and commit to supporting National Literacy Action Plans.
- Plans should identify and mobilise the wide range of individuals and institutions within a country that have a role to play in children’s literacy acquisition, including the public and private sectors, parents and communities and children themselves.
- Plans should commit to delivering the 8 Principles outlined in this report.

<sup>xvii</sup> Some countries may already have national reading plans (such as have been supported by USAID) or national policy frameworks for literacy – National Literacy Action Plans would serve to bring all that together into one place, go beyond just reading, and ensure there is sufficient political commitment and prioritisation and a clear action plan in place to deliver national literacy targets.

Najma, age 9, with a story book outside her home in the Chagi Bala village in the Battagram District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan.



# CALL TO ACTION: ENSURING EVERY LAST CHILD CAN READ

Every child has the right to learn from a quality education. Yet, we currently see at least 250 million children are unable to read, despite significant increases in school enrolment. Indeed, 130 million – more than half of those children who lack those basic literacy skills – have spent at least four years in primary education.<sup>126</sup> As Save the Children has also highlighted in our Every Last Child campaign, children who are excluded due to gender, disability, ethnicity or other reasons relating to poverty and discrimination are at an even greater risk of not receiving a quality education and the opportunity to learn how to read. If a child does not learn how to read, his or her ability to learn and progress at school becomes far more limited, which in turn increases the risk of growing up to become an adult living in poverty.<sup>xviii</sup> Whether or not a child learns to read and receives a quality education is strongly associated with his or her health, employment and financial outcomes as an adult. An investment in ensuring every last child is able to read is an investment in future prosperity.

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework has laid down an inspiring and ambitious agenda for the next fifteen years. SDG 4 on quality education reinforces that right to quality and inclusive education, and shifts away from simply focusing on universal primary school access, to an agenda focused on addressing the barriers to learning and equity gaps in education.<sup>xix</sup> This is a welcome and needed shift, which brings into stark focus the urgent need to scale-up efforts to ensure every last child is learning to read.

Save the Children is scaling-up its work on literacy to ensure every last child can read, and we call on governments, donors, other NGOs, and development agencies to do the same to ensure we prioritise literacy, build a culture of reading, and scale-up what works. This report presents an evidence-based framework, drawing on direct programming in 22 countries, to contribute to global thinking as to how this can be achieved.

## **All countries should prioritise literacy and adopt National Literacy Action Plans**

There is an urgent need for all countries to increase the prioritisation and mobilisation of resources dedicated to effective early literacy acquisition for

children aged 0-12 years in order to rapidly and effectively scale-up efforts to ensure every last child learns to read proficiently.

Unless governments, donors, NGOs and development agencies **make investing in literacy a top priority** right now, there will be little chance of achieving SDG 4, and many of the other SDGs, by 2030. Literacy is one of the critical foundations for all learning. This is captured by the proposed indicator for Target 4.1 for SDG 4, which focuses on proficiency in reading and mathematics.<sup>xx</sup> Without being able to read, it is almost impossible for children to learn and acquire other key skills and knowledge that are fundamental to their development and prosperity.

- All countries should ensure they develop and adopt National Literacy Action Plans to support children's early grade reading and writing.<sup>xxi</sup> National Literacy Action Plans should be supported by dedicated, equitable and fair financing; have targeted policies to remove any discrimination toward excluded groups; engage children, parents and communities and are accountable to them. They should also include a broad range of relevant actors, including the national media, libraries, the book publishing industry, local civil society and related government entities, for example the ministries of health, social welfare, and women and families.
- These should include pre-primary and early grade reading and learning targets to ensure that all children learn to read with comprehension by the time they leave primary school, and also set out how the children furthest behind will make progress to meet the targets in order to reduce equity gaps.
- Donors, NGOs and development agencies should ensure all their education interventions assess the impact on literacy acquisition and commit to supporting national literacy action plans.

This report affirms the importance of literacy, and presents Save the Children's most recent evidence and best practice on *how* to enable children to learn to read. We summarise these as the 8 Principles for Effective Literacy Action. These principles provide a comprehensive framework for international

<sup>xviii</sup> Writing is also an important foundational learning skill and a key component of literacy. This report presents evidence primarily on reading as this has been the focus of Save the Children's education programmes during the last four years.

<sup>xix</sup> SDG Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

<sup>xx</sup> Indicator for Target 4.1: Percentage of children/young people: (a) in Grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics. Disaggregations: sex, location, wealth (and others where data are available).

<sup>xxi</sup> Some countries may already have national reading plans strategies (such as have been supported by USAID) or national policy frameworks for literacy – but National Literacy Action Plans would serve to bring all of these pieces together into one place. These plans should include reading and writing, and ensure there is sufficient political commitment and prioritisation, and a clear action plan in place to deliver national literacy targets.

organisations, donors and governments that are looking to improve literacy and learning outcomes, help children become proficient readers, and give children a strong foundation for further learning. A full summary of the 8 Principles, and the key recommendations for each are available here in Table 2.

Our key recommendation is for governments – together with other key national stakeholders and partners – to work together to develop **National Literacy Action Plans**, which outline how they are going to scale-up what works to achieve the literacy targets in their national policy frameworks. Plans should include action to:

**TABLE 2 : 8 PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY ACTION**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <p><b>1. START EARLY:</b> Invest in scaling up cost effective and quality models for improving emergent literacy skills in the early years, including via supporting parenting education and strengthening the home literacy environment.</p> |
|    | <p><b>2. PROVIDE MORE AND BETTER BOOKS:</b> Take a ‘whole chain’ approach to book supply, working with publishers to increase the quality of materials.</p>   |
|    | <p><b>3. ENGAGE PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES:</b> Partner and invest in scaling-up implementation of effective community and parent-based literacy activities, which are adapted to the local context.</p>   |
|    | <p><b>4. ENSURE TEACHERS CAN TEACH READING:</b> Teacher training should include instruction on the five core reading skills.</p>  |
|   | <p><b>5. RECOGNISE THAT LANGUAGE MATTERS:</b> Provide support and resources for children who are learning in a language which is not their mother tongue.</p>   |
|  | <p><b>6. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE:</b> Remove barriers to reading practice and ensure that time is scheduled in the school day and encourage reading outside of school.</p>   |
|  | <p><b>7. ASSESS AND TRACK:</b> Invest in improved data collection on literacy to inform national and district policy and practice choices.</p>  |
|  | <p><b>8. POLICY:</b> Ensure literacy is prioritised for government investment and resource allocation, and is a consideration throughout education decision-making and across other relevant sectors.</p>                                     |

These principles highlight that a combination of in-school activities and parent and community engagement will be needed to improve children’s literacy skills. So National Literacy Action Plans must ensure they sufficiently prioritise efforts to galvanise and support communities and home environments to effectively encourage children’s learning, and provide opportunities for students to practice reading outside of the classroom. This is especially important when we consider that, in developing contexts, students typically spend as little as 11 per cent of their waking time in a school classroom, and an even smaller portion of that in-school time is devoted to improving reading skills.

To do this, our recommendation is that **National Literacy Action Plans should also include National Reading Campaigns** to increase awareness of the importance of literacy and to support increased parent and community engagement in children’s learning.

Only by doing all of these things, and doing them now, will we have a chance of achieving SDG 4 by 2030.

Save the Children’s research and programme experience has shown that there is an urgent need to prioritise literacy now, to build a culture of reading beyond the school and classroom. Literacy is the gateway to all further learning. We look forward to working with governments, donors, NGOs and civil society across the globe, building on the evidence to find collaborative solutions to ensure every child learns to read.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## PRINCIPLE 1: START EARLY

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Partnering with parents, at every level of literacy, to put in place home and community-based activities and environments which enable children to develop a solid foundation for reading and learning before they get to primary school.

#### Why:

Early literacy interventions have a high impact on children's ability to learn to read, and are cost-effective investments with high returns. They help reduce equity gaps in achievement by supporting disadvantaged children to do better, as well as reduce primary school drop-out rates and the numbers of children that repeat a grade.

#### How:

- Governments and donors should support development of children's emergent literacy skills from birth until they enter primary school by:
- Investing in and scaling-up existing, cost-effective provision models, including supporting parenting education and community outreach.
- Training Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) teachers in how to teach very specific early literacy skills.

## PRINCIPLE 2: MORE AND BETTER BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Children need a variety of age- and context-appropriate reading materials that spark their imagination and motivation to read, and build on their existing language skills.

#### Why:

There is a global shortage of age- and context/culture-appropriate children's books available in local-languages to support early grade reading.

#### How:

Take a 'whole chain' approach to book supply, working with publishers to increase the quality of materials while also ensuring that measures are in place to ensure their effective dissemination and use.

Invest in four key areas – quality, market demand, access, and effective use:

- **Quality** – build capacity of book publishing stakeholders (including writers, illustrators, editors and marketers) to improve the design, production, and quality of materials. This should include establishing and enforcing minimum quality standards and effective quality assurance mechanisms to ensure children's books are appropriate and available in local-languages.
- **Market Demand** – invest in the publishing industry to stimulate book production, using advance payments and ring-fenced book-buying budgets to provide the financial guarantees to stimulate local publishing.
- **Access** – continuously review children's access to reading materials, and work with schools, teachers and parents to provide effective support to increase access (e.g. book banks, reading clubs, and literacy events).
- **Effective Use** – incorporate guidance on book use within training programmes on teaching reading, and support parents to use books at home with their children.
- Support teachers, parents and communities to develop their own local-language reading materials to supplement those available from publishers, so that children have an abundance of interesting materials to practise reading.
- Bring donors, governments, private sector and other key partners together to support the establishment and operationalisation of a Global Book Fund to transform the supply of reading materials.



## PRINCIPLE 3: ENGAGE PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Parent and community members need to be engaged to support their children's language development and reading skills.

#### Why:

- Children need a home and community environment which is conducive to learning, in order to develop their reading skills.
- Given that in developing contexts, students sometimes spend as little as 11 per cent of their waking time in a school classroom, and an even smaller portion of that in-school time improving their reading skills – it is important that their home and community environment offers support for the development of literacy skills.

#### How:

- Invest in the implementation of effective community and parent-based literacy activities which are adapted to the local context – including the development of community action toolkits and materials, and training of community volunteers.
- Work society- and sector-wide to train and motivate community outreach workers who can deliver messages to new parents about how to support children to learn to read.

## PRINCIPLE 4: ENSURE TEACHERS CAN TEACH READING

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Teachers need to be trained and supported in explicit and systematic reading instruction, using the five core reading skills. <sup>xxii</sup>

#### Why:

Teachers are central to any successful effort to improve literacy outcomes, yet current pre- and in-service training frequently does not train teachers in how to effectively deliver core reading skills.

#### How:

- Ensure pre- and in-service training includes specific instruction in the five component reading skills, and that in-service training is sufficiently regular, practical and local/accessible.
- Invest in research to develop simple, innovative and time- and cost-effective methods of delivering the five component reading skills to teachers on a large scale.

## PRINCIPLE 5: LANGUAGE MATTERS

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Reading instruction and activities for children – both in- and out-of-school – should be conducted in a language that children understand.

#### Why:

Worldwide, 220 million children are being taught to read in a language that is not their mother tongue, and not the language used in their day-to-day lives. This forms a considerable barrier to both their ability to learn to read, and parents' and communities' ability to support their child's literacy skills development.

#### How:

- Use cutting-edge knowledge on language to develop literacy interventions. Conduct robust linguistic situational analyses, including reviews of language-in-education policies and mapping of language groups, before designing a new intervention.
- Collaborate with education officials to apply the most effective mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) model within the constraints of local policy.
- Ensure teachers are adequately prepared to teach in mother tongue languages.
- Implement comprehensive, social behaviour change and communication programmes to address language attitudes that would negatively impact literacy learning in multilingual contexts.
- Collect robust and nuanced data on language, to better understand its role in shaping the way children learn to read.

<sup>xxii</sup> Five components are: letter knowledge, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and reading comprehension.

## PRINCIPLE 6: PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Children need opportunities to practise their literacy skills, both inside and outside of schools.

#### Why:

The amount of time a child spends reading is positively related to successful acquisition of reading skills.

#### How:

- Remove the key barriers to reading practice – lack of dedicated/allocated time; insufficient volume and quality of reading materials; and lack of training and support for teachers and parents.
- **Time** – Governments and schools should ensure there is sufficient time for reading practice

scheduled into the curriculum and school day, and that parents and communities are encouraged to make dedicated time for reading outside of school.

- **Reading Materials** – see recommendations on ‘More and Better Books’, but also invest in activities to engage children in reading practice where books can be easily available – e.g. reading clubs, book banks, and reading buddies.
- **Training and support for teachers and parents** – develop guides and offer training to build teachers’ and parents’ confidence and skills for providing effective reading practice opportunities for children.

## PRINCIPLE 7: ASSESS AND TRACK

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Formative and summative reading assessments are conducted at regular intervals in order to tailor reading policies and programmes to the needs of individual learners, disadvantaged groups and students throughout the country.

#### Why:

At the classroom and school level, regular formative and summative assessments ensure that teaching of reading is continuously adjusted to meet learners’ needs. Better data can also inform better and more evidence-based national and district education policy-making to enable scale-up and replication of effective interventions and approaches which are responsive to children’s needs.

#### How:

- Invest in improved data collection and analysis to inform national and district education policy and practice choices.
- Ensure that learning assessments track comprehension, alongside other reading skills, as an important indicator of literacy acquisition.
- Ensure that data is disaggregated to enable progress on equity gaps to be monitored.
- Build teachers’ capacity to assess and use the results to inform lesson planning.

## PRINCIPLE 8: POLICY

### RECOMMENDATION

#### What:

Government policies and an enabling environment must exist to provide quality and sustained support to teachers, communities and children as they learn to read.

#### Why:

Many national education systems currently lack policies and programmes explicitly targeted at ensuring every last child can learn to read by the end of primary school.

#### How:

- All countries should ensure they develop and adopt National Literacy Action Plans to support children’s early grade reading and writing.

- These should include: strategies to start early; early grade reading and learning targets to ensure that all children learn to read with comprehension by the time they leave primary school; and set out how the children furthest behind will make progress to meet the targets in order to reduce equity gaps.
- Donors, NGOs and development agencies should ensure all their education interventions assess the impact on literacy acquisition and commit to supporting National Literacy Action Plans.
- National Reading Campaigns should be established in all countries to bring all sectors of society together to raise awareness of the importance of literacy, and to encourage parent and community engagement in children’s literacy and learning.

# APPENDIX

**TABLE 4. SITE CHARACTERISTICS FROM LITERACY PROJECTS THAT COLLECTED MIDLINE OR ENDLINE DATA IN 2012-2015..**

Country and Site	Year of Data Collection	Number of Programme Students Assessed	Language Tested	Number of Programme Schools Assessed	Average Age (Years)	% Female	% Readers <sup>xxiii</sup>	Number of Comprehension Questions
Bangladesh Site A	2014	253	Bengali	17	9.3	51.8%	77.1%	6
El Salvador Site A	2014	480	Spanish	30	9.3	46.5%	79.0%	2
Ethiopia Site A	2014	300	Tigrigna	15	10	47.3%	91.3%	5
Haiti Site A	2015	241	Creole	27	8.1	42.3%	92.1%	5
			French				93.4%	5
Haiti Site B	2015	218	Creole	20	9.4	50%	59.2%	5
			French				57.8%	5
Indonesia Site A	2015	326	Bahasa Indonesia	50	8.1	50%	77.9%	6
Malawi Site A	2015	379	Chichewa	24	8.7	50.1%	14.5%	4
			English				5.3%	5
Mali Site A	2015	1291	French	80	n/a	50.3%	21.9%	5
Nepal Site A	2014 & 2015	285	Nepali	12	8.4	54.2%	99.6%	4
Pakistan Site A	2013	178	Urdu	35	8.8	49.4%	64.8%	4
			Pashto				50.6%	4
Pakistan Site B	2014	179	Urdu	22	8.1	49.4%	90.5%	4
Philippines Site A	2014	426	Tagalog	1	8.5	51.2%	83.7%	6
			English				67.1%	6
Philippines Site B	2015	100	Filipino	9	8.8	53.0%	51.0%	5
Rwanda Site A	2015	614	Kinyarwanda	33	9.3	47.2%	46.4%	12
South Africa Site A	2015	198	Sesotho	10	n/a	56.6%		5
		200	Siswati	10	n/a	60.5%		5
		398	English	16	n/a	58.5%		5
Vietnam Site A	2014	2466	Vietnamese	44	9.1	49.6%	96.3%	5
Zimbabwe Site A	2014	120	English	60	9.5	47.5%	60.5%	5
			Shona				58.5%	5

<sup>xxiii</sup> In this analysis, 'readers' are defined as children who can read a grade-level passage on their own, and more specifically, can read at least five words correctly in the first 30 seconds of reading.

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# LESSONS IN LITERACY

## 8 Principles to Ensure Every Last Child Can Read

Over the last several decades the world has made incredible progress in getting children into school. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that every last child is learning. While the focus on access to school has been important, it has been prioritised over the quality of learning, leading to what has been termed a 'global learning crisis'.

This global learning crisis has meant that 250 million children cannot read – 130 million of whom cannot read despite completing at least four years of education.

Reading is key to enabling children to fulfil their potential at school and throughout their lives. Learning to read can impact a child's health, employment and financial outcomes when they grow up.

This report presents 8 Principles for Effective Literacy Action, and draws on evidence from Save the Children's focus on literacy, a four year global ambition (2012-2015) to ensure every last child leaves primary school able to read.

We are at a critical juncture in history. In order to ensure every last child can read by 2030, there must be investment in literacy now. To do this, governments must work with partners to develop National Literacy Action Plans and National Reading Campaigns, as well as follow the 8 Principles presented in this report.

Only by doing all of these things, and doing them now, will we have a chance to ensure every last child can read by 2030.

[savethechildren.net/lessons-in-literacy](https://savethechildren.net/lessons-in-literacy)